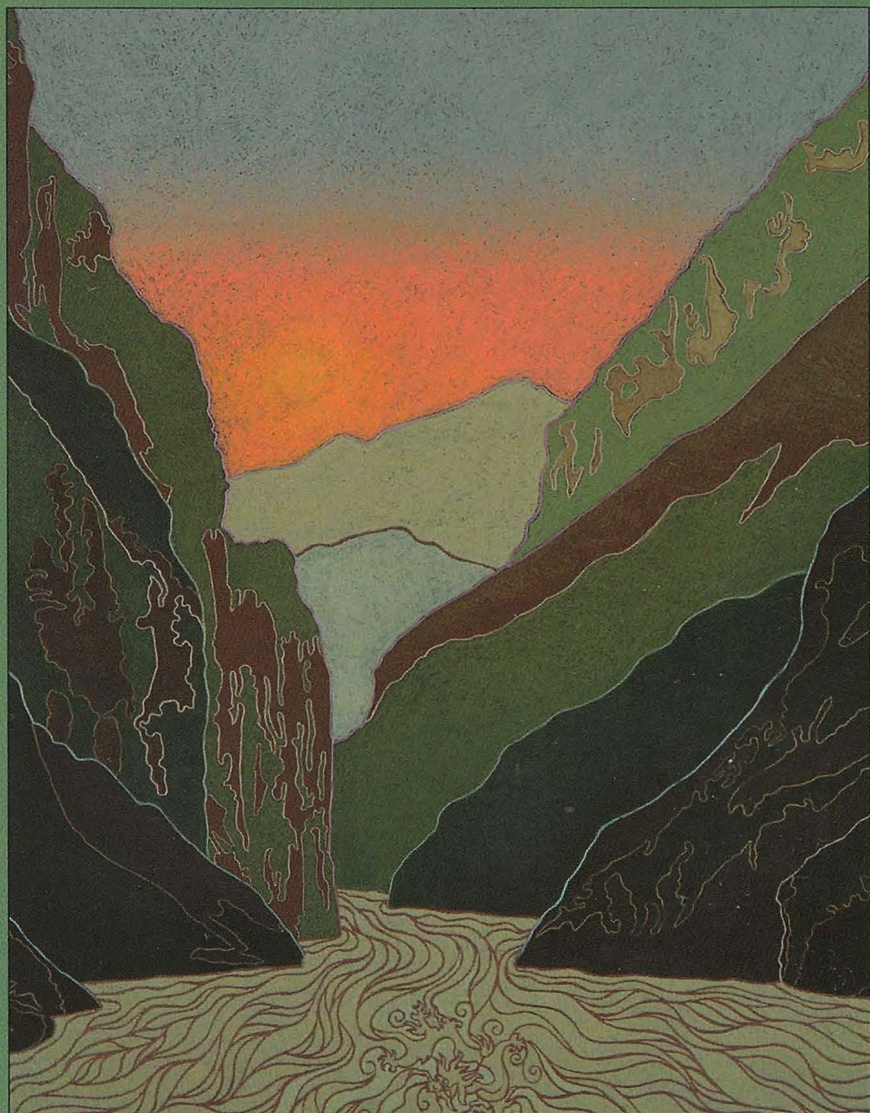


Archetypal Acupuncture

Healing with the Five Elements



Gary Dolowich, M.D.

B.Ac., Dipl.Ac.

Archetypal Acupuncture



T'ai
The Harmony of
Heaven and
Earth
—I Ching



In my middle years I've grown rather fond of the Way,
And I came to dwell at the foot of Jade Mountain.
When the spirit moves, I wander alone
Amidst beauty that is all for me. . . .
I follow the stream back to its Source,
Then sit and watch the rising clouds—
And some day meet an old wood-cutter
And talk and laugh and never return.¹

—Wang Wei, *eighth-century Chinese poet*

1. Wang Wei, "My Retreat at Mount Chung-Nan," in *The Jade Mountain*, trans. Witter Bynner (New York: Vintage Books, 1929), p. 195.

Archetypal Acupuncture

*Healing with
the Five Elements*

Gary Dolowich, M.D., B.Ac., Dipl.Ac.

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For Sena,
love of my life

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Foreword

The past and the future are here today. The book you hold before you has the potential to fill a void in your awareness, as you gain a better understanding of the less tangible realms around and inside you. The linear analytical world dominated so long by patriarchal influences does not exist alone, although modern culture has many believing otherwise. The principles of Newtonian physics rule this three-dimensional physical plane that we know through our ordinary daily experiences, yet the universe defined in terms of quantum mechanics has a circular shape and operates both in the external landscape and in our internal selves.

What you cannot see has been difficult to grasp. As we explore traditional models of healing, we discover a very rich environment where the relationships are striking, dynamic, and colorful, adding a deeper experience to our lives. Our anatomy is now multi-dimensional and understanding how one part interacts with others brings wholistic medicine alive. The seasons, nature, and our organ systems are expansive, vivid, playful, tragic, and certainly dramatic. Uniting the tangible with the intangible aspects of life fulfills our potential, creating a new paradigm of health and illness. This book invites you to redefine your experiences and expand your borders.

Both the form and the formless are well recognized by Chinese medicine historically. However, ever since Mao came to power within the last sixty years bringing the communist emphasis on dialectical materialism, the medicine in China has primarily

focused on treating the physical body. Thus, the levels of the mind, emotions, and spirit—which previously added richness and depth to its medical approach—have been forsaken in what is known today as Traditional Chinese Medicine or TCM. What you have in front of you is a contribution toward restoring the great spiritual legacy that was prohibited during the Cultural Revolution. Dr. Dolowich's book resurrects the heart of China's ancient system of medicine, allowing us to share in its deep wisdom.

Though largely unknown to those exploring the cognitive and psychological realms in the field of neuroscience, there exists a common functional unit that is the foundation for a logically consistent understanding of behavior, not only in pathology but especially in health. Caught in the constricting web of the tangible, researchers are looking to the neuron and the brain for such a fundamental construct and remain blind to other parts of ourselves. As DNA is the genetic unit that underlies our physical selves, the functional unit of our behavioral selves is the archetype, brilliantly described by Jung and recognized by the Chinese for thousands of years, especially in the models of the Five Elements and the Twelve Officials. These forces tend to operate in each of us in unconscious ways due to a lack of awareness. As we begin to identify the powers and dangers inherent in them we can learn to harness their energy in a truly transformative process. Here is an exceptional opportunity to tap into the world beyond duality—into the spiritual, where the past and the future merge.

Does your Warrior stay asleep when the alarm rings? Does your King or Queen abdicate power to the fates? Does your Earth lose her ability to digest and assimilate experiences? How can we recognize such imbalances? What can we do about them? How can we be more aware of our process and its effect on the environment around us? Is our Colon functioning on the mental level to get rid

of thoughts that no longer serve us? Is the warmth of our Fire allowing us to make friends with these potentials on the inside as well as to connect with others on the outside? As we become more familiar with these intangible images that are active within, we can exercise greater choice in the grand opera that is so vividly dramatized in our lives.

Our consciousness is asking for change; for that to happen we must become aware and reunite with these separated parts, completing our wholeness. This book explores an elusive yet vitally important aspect of our anatomy—the archetypal realm. The map for understanding its interactions lies within these pages. The process is like the decoding of a treasure map that has been cryptically written using symbols that always point toward internal energies. As we appreciate the patterns that underlie our unity, consciousness changes, allowing us to take a more active role in how our lives unfold. We are approaching the sunrise of great change, so needed in the world today. Here is the doorway. Please come in. . . .

Gary Klapman, M.D., Lic.Ac.
Santa Cruz, California
February 2004

Preface

This book has been a natural outgrowth of my experience in teaching the Five Element system of medicine. It is intended both for serious acupuncture students as well as for anyone interested in exploring an approach to health based on the rhythms of the natural world. In addition to active involvement in acupuncture colleges since 1983, I have taught seminars to interested patients and to the general public at community colleges. Over these twenty-plus years, my focus has always been on discovering the most effective way to communicate an awareness of *ch'i* (vital energy) to others. Thus, the selection of poetry, case histories, quotations, music, and examples from movies and television that are included here are the materials that have worked in the classroom to bring the models alive. The practice of medicine is to a great extent about teaching and, in explaining the nature of treatments to clients, I continually gain useful insights as to how to talk about the elements and archetypes. Rather than an academic approach or a text based on research, this manuscript has been born in relationship to others and has matured over time.

I need to say up front that I am not a scholar of Chinese philosophy and don't read or write the language. I am, however, deeply connected to the wisdom traditions of ancient China, which speak to my soul. In the interest of consistency, I have chosen to present Chinese words in the romanized form with which I first became acquainted with them and worked with them until they became familiar friends. This is the Wade-Giles system, found in a

rich legacy of spiritual classics well known in the West. The Pinyin system, formally adopted by the government of modern China, is generally used in most acupuncture writing today. To assist those more familiar with this latter form, I have included an appendix of equivalent spellings, which also contains selected English translations. Although all constructs of romanization are ultimately arbitrary and do not change the deeper meaning of the concepts, I intend to stay with the version that, for me, links Chinese medicine back to its original spiritual roots.

In the interest of clarity I have presented Chinese words in italics. In addition, I have elected to italicize book titles and new concepts and phrases, especially the first time they are presented. Capitalization will be used for the models that are discussed, such as the names of the elements, officials, archetypes, and trigrams. Thus, the Earth element will be distinguished by case from the planet earth and, likewise, the Liver official will be capitalized in contrast to the liver organ. For dates, I have chosen the connotation that does not have religious overtones: B.C.E. (Before Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era).

In dealing with the perennial problem of gender pronouns in the English language, I will consistently use one form in any given example, but will freely interchange between masculine and feminine throughout the text. Often, I will try to select the gender that stretches the predominant cultural bias—for example, using feminine pronouns to speak of a person accessing the strength of *her* inner Warrior, or describing the need for an individual to find the compassion of *his* Queen archetype with masculine words. At times, when it seems to fit the flow of the discussion, I will include both genders and say *he or she*.

As a Western-trained physician practicing Chinese medicine, I have always been concerned with integrating West and East, think-

ing and feeling, scientific biomedicine and spiritual practice. Much in this book is my own unique synthesis of traditions, and the title, *Archetypal Acupuncture: Healing with the Five Elements*, suggests that the reader will find ancient elemental wisdom explored with the flavor of modern Jungian archetypal psychology. The goal of this endeavor is to contribute, in some small way, to a return to a more simple, healthy lifestyle, so desperately needed in the world today. In my opinion, working with the Five Element model, built as it is on images from nature, supports an awakening of spirit and reinforces a sense of the unity inherent in all things.

Acknowledgements

So many teachers have provided guidance and support over the years and their insights have culminated in the creation of this book. I am grateful to my mentor and friend, Dr. Fritz Smith, who first opened my eyes to the possibility of healing the whole person. I will always be indebted to Professor J. R. Worsley, transmitter of the Five Element tradition from China, for teaching me how to bring the spirit realm alive in the treatment room. To Wayne Souza, soul brother and fellow acupuncturist, many thanks for introducing me to the Jungian model of the archetypes. I would also like to acknowledge Bob Duggan for the vision that has empowered so many to bring a deeper level of healing to the Western world. There have been a number of spiritual advisors who have been part of my journey, always appearing at just the right moment: Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, Tarthang Tulku, Noel Hurd, and Father Isaiah. Thank you for showing me the Way.

It has been my path to teach and explore the ever-expanding world of the elements. Over the years, I have had the good fortune to be associated with three superb colleges of Chinese medicine. I would like to honor Dorit Reznik and Tim Chapman for the courage and leadership that has sustained the Academy for Five Element Acupuncture in Florida and mention fellow faculty, particularly Vicki Pollard and Howard Evans, for their ongoing commitment to the spirit of this inspiring system of medicine. Thanks to Ron Zaidman and Joanna Chou, and fellow Five Element teachers Mary

Huse and Tala Lindaro, for the opportunity to teach in my hometown at the Five Branches Institute in Santa Cruz, California. My first instruction of others in acupuncture took place at what is now the TAI-Sophia Institute in Maryland. I want to express gratitude to the faculty there—especially Dianne Connelly, Jack Daniel, Peter Eckman, Charlotte Kerr, Khosrow Khalighi, Peter Marinakis, Jim McCormick, Julia Measures, and Bill Mueller—for the inspiration to bring the energy alive; and to Barbara Ellrich and Susan Duggan, whose nurturing presence has kept the school flourishing. In addition, thanks to all of the acupuncture students it has been my privilege to teach: your enthusiasm for the material has kept me excited about the work. It was directly from these classroom experiences that this manuscript has evolved.

Daily, in my work at Jade Mountain Health Centre, I learn about healthcare as a spiritual practice. Together with my colleagues, particularly Jeri Bodemar, Darlena L'Orange, Susan Mankowski, Charlie Singer, and Charmian Traynor, we find a way to be there for others and also take care of ourselves. Over several years, I taught seminars for clients, and I wish to thank, among others, Emily Sanford and Celeste Mercer, as well as Gertrude Karnow and Bev Marvin (who are no longer with us), for all that I learned in the process. At Casa de la Cultura in Pajaro, I have the blessing of bringing health care to a population that otherwise might not receive it, and I am grateful to Sister Rosa Dolores, Sister Theresa, and Phyllis Daney for making this undertaking possible. And to my many patients, too numerous to name, who give me their trust, thank you for being my greatest teachers.

A host of friends have been there to encourage my process and share ideas, many of which have found their way into this work. Many thanks to Len Beyea, Michael Burton, Gary Hillerson, Gary Klapman, Michael Miller, Herb Sherman, Phil Wagner, and Jim and Karly Zeno, for many conversations on how to live one's truth. I

appreciate the T'ai Ch'i instruction of Daniel Feldman, who coaches me with a mixture of Kabbalah and ancient mysticism. Thanks to Phil Gutin and Joe Weissberg for helping me stay sane during medical school, and to Ken and Sheila Lefkowitz for showing me how to live life with integrity. And to my men's drumming circle, for providing a forum for getting in touch with archetypal energies.

I want to acknowledge all those whose efforts specifically led to the creation of this book. Darlena L'Orange first asked me to co-author *Ancient Roots, Many Branches*, pushing me to put my ideas into concrete form, and has long encouraged me on this path of writing. I would like to thank Gary Hillerson for his sensitivity and skill in the art of bookmaking, as well as for the technical support that has allowed my creative endeavors to take shape in the world. Joann Gutin, Lonny Jarrett, and George Ow provided advice regarding the world of publishing, and Richard Klein and Holly Blue Hawkins assisted with legal considerations. My daughter Jordana did an initial editing and final proofreading; her skill in language has been formative. My wife, Sena, Darlena L'Orange, Gail Michaelis-Ow, and George Ow all read the manuscript, offering many useful suggestions. Madelyn McCaul poured over the material with me, and her skill in copy editing has been a tremendous help along the way. Finally, I want to thank Mark Ong for the creativity and experience that has guided this work into its final form.

My family has been a source of strength and meaning, allowing me to find the time to write. Thank you to my children—Jordana, Ariel, and Elisa—for your love. To my deceased relatives, my parents, Milton and Gertrude, and my sister, Donna, your memory is a blessing. I would like to acknowledge the elders—Edith, Sarah, Ben, Ann, Harry—and my ancestors, as well as those who have died for the sanctification of the Name, for all that has been passed on to me. And most of all, to my wife and partner, Sena: your steady support and love have made this book possible.

Introduction

And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.¹

—*William Shakespeare*

My first exposure to the world of Chinese medicine was prompted by a dissatisfaction with the symptomatic approach of Western biomedicine in which I was trained, along with a growing interest in Eastern philosophy. Upon hearing of a local physician who had successfully incorporated acupuncture into his medical practice, I followed a hunch and spent an afternoon with Fritz Smith, M.D. What I observed effectively changed the direction of my life's work.

CASE HISTORY: I can still remember the middle-aged woman who came into the office complaining of shoulder pain that had been present for about five months. A simple problem of tendonitis, I thought, to be treated with anti-inflammatory medication and physical therapy. Instead, for no apparent reason, Dr. Smith inquired whether she had suffered a loss around the time that this condition first appeared. As I wondered what had prompted him to ask that question, I was amazed to see tears well up in the patient's eyes as she related the story of the recent death of her father. She expressed a sadness

which, until this time, she had not allowed herself to feel, since it had been her role in the family to keep everyone happy. After this release of stored-up emotions, acupuncture therapy was then performed, using points on the wrist. At the conclusion of the treatment the woman felt less pain and was moving her arm more freely. I was even more impressed by the fact that she now appeared less depressed, and I could see that a spark had returned to her eyes. Clearly, she was on the road back to health.

Only later was I to learn that, according to the model of Five Element acupuncture, there were diagnostic clues in the patient's color and voice that pointed toward the emotion of grief. Dr. Smith had inserted needles in specific energetic pathways that were associated with this emotion and also ran through the region of the shoulder. Through addressing the problem on the level of the acupuncture meridians, the body and mind could be treated as a unity, something that was rarely achieved when working within a scientific framework that separates an individual into disparate parts and treats her as a broken machine. From this experience I knew that this was the work I wanted to be doing when I grew up! On a personal level, I was filled with joy at the prospect of bringing together my explorations of the spiritual teachings of China, which had become a great source of inspiration for me, with my daily practice of medicine. Unexpectedly, a path had emerged that allowed me to end the split, all too common in our modern world, that existed between my inner truth and the way in which I earned a living.

After thirty-three years of treating patients, I certainly am aware of the areas in which the scientific method excels. These include acute emergencies, surgical situations, technological interventions, and diseases such as bacterial infections that can be measured in the laboratory. In my experience, however, the majority of conditions

faced on the frontlines of primary care tend to be of a different sort: headaches, back pain, digestive ailments, fatigue, depression—disorders that in some way relate to stress and lifestyle issues. All of these ailments are chronic in nature, involve the mind as well as the body, and are often labeled “functional” by Western science because no precise etiology can be found. In treating these cases through biomedicine, I felt frustrated by an approach that removed the illness from the context of a person’s life and merely sought to suppress symptoms. I knew that if the underlying cause was not addressed, the problem was likely to recur. Because I simply did not have the right tools for the diseases that were presented to me in general practice, I traveled in 1978 to the College of Traditional Chinese Acupuncture in England to study with the late Professor J. R. Worsley.

While in England, I discovered a way to treat the very conditions that were not responsive to conventional methods. Five Element acupuncture (one of a number of modalities found within the time-honored system of Chinese medicine) provides a construct to understand the patient’s symptoms as an expression of the vital energies. As these internal flows are brought into balance, treatments are able to reach the root of the disorder. In problems involving the mind and body it becomes possible to address the interplay of both levels, for the unity of the human being is central to ancient Chinese thought. And, since this approach to medical care arises out of a spiritual tradition that emphasizes living in harmony with nature, it offers a positive vision of wellness.

I have since managed to blend both Eastern and Western medicine in my work. In twenty-five years of specializing in acupuncture, I have never experienced a conflict between these two worlds; rather, they seem to mutually enhance and support one another. In fact, in describing the choice of modalities available to clients, it seems best to avoid the term *alternative medicine*, which implies the

need to select one therapy over another, and to instead use the more inclusive phrase *complementary medicine*. Where the allopathic method of science deals with symptoms on the physical level, the focus of traditional healing practices that originated in cultures tied to the natural world is on the deeper energy of life. As we will see, each view tends to address only half of reality, and both are needed for wholeness. Being able to draw upon diverse models has tremendous potential for expanding the range of conditions we can effectively diagnose and treat. The integration of the two great systems of Chinese and Western medicine is, in itself, an example of the philosophy of *yin/yang*, which teaches the importance of balance between any pair of complements.

The vision behind *Archetypal Acupuncture: Healing with the Five Elements* is to describe the Five Element tradition of ancient China from a vantage point that includes modern biomedicine, Jungian archetypal psychology, and spiritual teachings from around the world. In this book we will examine the similarities that exist between the patterns of Chinese medicine and the archetypes of the unconscious, first delineated by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, and in doing so uncover the unifying principles in Eastern and Western philosophy. As we explore the universal symbols that are shared by both perspectives, symbols that penetrate into the very energies underlying the transformations of life, a new synthesis of East and West can emerge, an *archetypal acupuncture* for the Western world.

Based on a timeless wisdom, the foundation of acupuncture is *ch'i*, the vital force. This is the life energy, flowing through meridian pathways in the body, which animates the world of form and is at the root of our very existence. Since it has eluded the measurements of science, the concept of *ch'i* has long remained a barrier to the acceptance of Chinese medicine in the West. Yet, just because it

stretches our worldview, this understanding is the greatest gift that the East can offer our culture at this crucial time in history. The paradigm of *energy medicine* provides another lens from which to view reality, one that can guide us on a “journey toward wholeness.” The possibilities for healing, however, extend beyond the individual to society at large. Indeed, the model of the Five Elements presents a way to address the roots of the energetic imbalance that lies beneath the seemingly insurmountable problems of our times. On the most fundamental level, the pervasive dis-ease of modern life stems from an alienation from nature and from our own inner nature. In the words of Joseph Campbell, the study of ancient wisdom traditions brings

an opportunity for the West to regain contact with a forgotten side of life, and with the whole history and heritage of mankind’s life in the spirit.²

NOTES

1. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 5, lines 165–167.
2. Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image*, Bollingen Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 356.

CHAPTER 1

East Meets West

The Place of Chinese Medicine in the Western World

It's like a tear in the hands of a Western person,
it'll tell you 'bout salt, carbon and water.

But a tear to a Chinese person,
it'll tell you 'bout sadness and sorrow—
and the love of a man and a woman.¹

—Jefferson Starship, "Ride the Tiger"

Chinese medicine is said to have been practiced for almost five thousand years; its origins lie in the earliest stratum of history, shrouded in mystery. According to the tradition handed down through the ages, acupuncture was developed by Huang Ti, the Yellow Emperor (2600 B.C.E.), and herbs were discovered by Shen Nung (3400 B.C.E.), mythical sages who symbolize a timeless wisdom. The medical system that developed in China cannot be understood apart from the country's two indigenous religions, which continue to be meaningful for people today. Taoism offers a mystical path for living simply, free of attachments, in harmony with the rhythms of nature. Confucianism is more about life in the world, emphasizing correct relationships and responsible action. These two philosophies complement each other, reflecting the teaching of *yin* and *yang*, and the ideal balance is to be Confucian in one's public life while Taoist in private. As Chinese medi-

cine evolved over the millennia and spread throughout Asia, it has always maintained roots in these venerable spiritual paths.

Because it cannot be separated from the culture that gave it birth, presenting Chinese medicine to a Western audience can be a formidable task. The challenge lies in finding a common language that can speak to those with a background in science and yet remain true to the spirit of this Eastern tradition. The temptation exists to discuss concepts acceptable to conventional thinking and focus on pain reduction, symptom relief, and biochemical effects. In the past, I have given such presentations to physicians at the local hospital and have come away with the impression that I had, in a certain sense, done a disservice by reinforcing the notion that all of life could be analyzed through the scientific method. Should a model of healing that has successfully treated much of the world's population for thousands of years be judged by the assumptions of a system that is only a few hundred years old? The potential contribution of Chinese medicine to health care, and to Western culture in general, is that it opens up an entirely new way to deal with illness and to understand life. In order to explore the underlying truth behind this system of medicine, we will need to stretch our boundaries and move beyond culturally specific ways of thinking.

The question arises as to whether the medicine of China can be considered a true science. It can be argued that, since it is an internally consistent, logical system that uses a clear vocabulary, Chinese medicine does indeed satisfy the criterion. Drawing upon a methodology that is basically empirical, its theory, diagnosis, and treatment have been built through the centuries on the most careful observation of patients. On the other hand, this system of medicine is certainly not founded on the rigorously designed, controlled experiments that are insisted upon as the condition for science in the Western world. Since the focus is on aspects of life that often cannot

be measured objectively, it becomes difficult for Eastern methods to conform to these standards. Moreover, it is considered unethical in China to perform double-blind studies that require withholding effective treatments from patients who are ill.

We can see how the reductionist approach of Western biomedicine is itself the product of a scientific method that insists on isolating a single variable. In contrast, indigenous healing traditions tend to seek the broadest possible understanding and will typically fail to satisfy these rigid requirements. Perhaps our notion of what is scientific, being culturally defined, is far too narrow. The historian of science, Thomas Kuhn, has compared generally accepted scientific practice to an inflexible box, where “phenomena that will not fit the box are often not seen at all.”² Thus, it seems that the question whether Chinese medicine can be classified as a science depends upon our definition. In the interest of clarity, I will distinguish between Western scientific and Eastern energetic models. To my mind, both systems have equal validity.

Fundamentally, science deals with what can be measured, with things that can be known for certain. Diseases that can be analyzed in this physical way often respond quite nicely to biomedical treatment. Where a definite etiology exists—for example, when bacteria that are the cause of pneumonia can be grown in the laboratory and an antibiotic can be shown to suppress that growth—the tools of Western medicine are unsurpassed. Science also offers one perspective from which to investigate Chinese medicine. In studying ancient practices we clearly must build upon the foundation provided by modernity’s understanding of life. It certainly would be a tremendous loss to disregard the gifts that are the heritage of the West in an attempt to become imitators of the East.

Indeed, there is an impressive body of literature documenting the clinical efficacy of Chinese medicine. It has long been known

that acupuncture can influence physiological measurements, such as blood pressure and cardiac output. Studies with laboratory animals consistently demonstrate elevation of pain thresholds with stimulation of acupuncture points. In human subjects, electroencephalograph recordings show that acupuncture can alter brain wave responses to electric shock. Through functional magnetic resonance imaging we know that points used to treat visual problems actually “light up” the visual cortex of the brain. In November 1998, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* came out with a landmark issue devoted to alternative medicine. It reported controlled clinical studies that support the effectiveness of moxibustion (burning of the herb mugwort on an acupuncture point) for correcting breech presentation in pregnancy³ and the ability of Chinese herbal prescriptions to treat irritable bowel syndrome. A panel at the National Institute of Health recently concluded that acupuncture reduces nausea due to chemotherapy and most forms of pain. The World Health Organization’s list of conditions that are appropriate for acupuncture therapy is far more extensive. Clearly, Western science has been successful in documenting the benefits of Chinese medicine.

Probably the most exciting area of research, in terms of uncovering the mechanism through which acupuncture exerts its influence on the body, lies in the discovery of endorphins. These naturally occurring, morphine-like compounds within the brain are known to provide a sense of well-being and are a built-in mechanism for pain control. Acupuncture has been shown to increase the level of these chemicals, and injection of the drug naloxone, which blocks the action of morphine and endorphins, also blocks acupuncture’s effects. From these studies, it seems likely that researchers have identified a biochemical mediator for the changes that result from acupuncture. The presence of endorphins in the hypothalamus and

mid-brain, along with imaging studies that demonstrate electrical activity in this region following stimulation of acupuncture points, suggests that this is the area that is integral to the changes that result from treatments. Since there are direct connections from this part of the brain to the hormones (via the pituitary gland) and to the limbic system (which is said to be “the seat of the emotions”), the role of endorphins helps explain the wide range of functions that can respond to acupuncture therapy.

These studies are certainly useful, and serve as a bridge for introducing Chinese medicine into the West. The problem with the research, however, is that it tends to force this ancient system into the modern world’s dominant paradigm, ignoring, or worse, depreciating aspects that don’t fit the scientific model. Most disturbing is the insistence by some authorities that strictly conducted experiments are the only way to evaluate traditional methods of healing. The editors of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, spokesmen for orthodox medicine, even go so far as to insist that

Until solid evidence is available that demonstrates the safety, efficacy, and effectiveness of specific alternative medicine interventions, uncritical acceptance of untested and unproven alternative medicine therapies must stop.⁴

This is quite a pronouncement in light of the fact that over four billion people around the planet currently rely upon herbal medicine for some portion of their health care. In addition, by most estimates, only about one-third of the advice given by contemporary Western-trained physicians can be substantiated by experimental data.

As traditionally practiced, Chinese medicine does not separate the patient from the disease process or the practitioner from the treatment. Isolating single variables to *prove* their efficacy thus becomes an impossible task. It is a real concern that, in order to fit

the generally accepted criterion for science, medical therapies based upon models of natural healing are increasingly being studied as symptomatic, cookbook formulas. Each labeled disease then receives the identical prescription and the patient, rather than being treated as a unique individual, finds himself pigeonholed into a pre-existing category and, once again, is not heard. Any approach that is truly wholistic⁵ will ask, Who is the person who has this condition and what does it mean in his life? Ten patients with migraine headaches may then receive ten entirely different treatments. In an effort to conform to conventional research designs, the real value of ancient medical practices may be lost.

What is not addressed at all in these studies is the *ch'i*, the life energy that has always been the basic tenet behind the medicine of China throughout the ages. In a medical system built on this concept, diagnosis evaluates the state of this force, while treatment is aimed at bringing it into balance. To date, however, no researcher has ever been able to dissect a meridian pathway or measure the flow of vital energy. Despite the lack of concrete evidence, we need to stay open to this interpretation if we are to have a real appreciation of how acupuncture works. Perhaps in the future we will develop the instruments that are sensitive enough to measure it, but, for now, *ch'i* cannot be quantified through the tools of science.

Rational thought can excel within its appropriate arena, but reason sets the boundaries far too narrowly, and a great deal of life falls outside of its domain. In exploring the disharmonies that lie at the root of illness, we are quite often led to issues that elude the scientific method.⁶ Furthermore, when analyzed in a logical, *cause-and-effect* way, diseases tend to be seen as either arising solely from the physical level or, if tests are negative, labeled as psychosomatic (implying that "it is all in your head"). In many chronic conditions,

this compartmentalization may be misleading, and it is certainly not very helpful. Once a condition is longstanding, all levels of human experience, *body, mind, and spirit*, are generally involved.

The medicine handed down from traditional earth-based cultures, in contrast to dualistic thinking, developed out of an intimate understanding of how things are in nature. Embracing the unity and interconnectedness of life, these systems offer a way to hold illness that does not separate the mind from the body. Since this approach seeks to grasp the energetic pattern beneath the symptoms, it focuses on the process rather than the content and invariably embraces the emotional and spiritual realms. However, *ch'i*, the underlying principle behind a great many natural methods of health care from around the world, like life itself, ultimately remains a mystery. To try to interpret *energy medicine* solely in terms of current Western models mistranslates it miserably.

The unnecessary conflict between Western and Eastern understandings of the truth is not unlike the struggle between science and spirituality in European history. The over-emphasis on “correct” religious belief during the Middle Ages led to an equally one-sided belief in science with the advent of the Renaissance. Yet, some things naturally fall within the province of science and can be known through its tools, while other areas of life are best explored through poetry, spiritual practices, and by trusting one’s heart. Life is sufficiently complex and mysterious to allow for these diverse viewpoints. As Jung points out in his essay “Yoga and the West,”

There are no grounds whatsoever for any conflict between these two things. Both are necessary, for knowledge alone, like faith alone, is always insufficient.⁷



Of course, very few patients come for treatment with questions about scientific validity. Their concern is likely to be much more pragmatic: finding the approach that will alleviate their suffering. The health care practitioner should also be interested in applying the most effective therapeutic method. One is not being asked to master these wide-ranging fields, only to have the open-mindedness that allows referring elsewhere where appropriate. It is a terrible mistake and a missed opportunity to advise any patient that she must “live with the problem” until all possibilities have been exhausted.

The power of Western scientific medicine is certainly unparalleled in conditions where an illness can be approached anatomically. I recall treating an elderly gentleman for incapacitating sciatica pain due to spinal stenosis, a narrowing of his spinal column that was impinging on the nerve roots. When there was no improvement after six acupuncture sessions, he elected to seek surgery. The procedure successfully corrected the physical level constriction and his pain was alleviated. Here was a lesson in the limits of therapy based on energy balancing. Indeed, whenever a disease is far advanced with measurable pathology, biomedicine may have a dramatic benefit. In many cases of serious chronic illness, and certainly in acute emergencies, the Western system can be truly lifesaving. Of course, once treatment is instituted at the appropriate level, the opportunity always exists to find ways to support the whole person.

Then there are the many situations where Chinese medicine offers the more helpful intervention.

CASE HISTORY: I treated a middle-aged woman suffering from hip arthritis, who had consulted a number of orthopedic doctors, only to find that the medication she was given had side effects that were worse than the condition itself. Unhappy with symptomatic treatments, she came

to me for acupuncture. Upon meeting her it was clear that, in addition to hip pain, this woman was depressed and had become withdrawn from life. An inquiry into what was going on around the time her problem first appeared uncovered an incident in which a co-worker had tried to seduce her teenage daughter, leaving the woman furious. The patient's anger at the time was certainly appropriate, only it was now two years later and she was still consumed with it. Whereas Western psychosomatic medicine might imply that the anger is the cause of the hip pain, thereby splitting the mind from the body, Chinese medicine simply treats the imbalance in the energy that underlies a constellation of symptoms being expressed on all levels of the individual. One of the acupuncture meridians associated with anger (the Gall Bladder pathway) travels through the hip joint, so the interrelationship of the physical and emotional aspects can be understood by this model in a way that validates the woman's entire experience.

As it turned out, acupuncture therapy in this case was able to bring the energy pathway into balance—and the result was a total transformation. The woman's anger abated, she began to sleep better, and she resumed her involvement in outside activity. Essentially, she was able to move from being stuck in an emotion that was draining her vitality back into the fullness of life. While the pain is what brought her in the door, it turned out to be only one manifestation of a disturbance that was far more pervasive, involving her whole being. At the conclusion of the sessions she still had some residual hip discomfort, though it was certainly much reduced and no longer dominated her life. Yet, despite all these wonderful changes, if this woman were part of a scientific study she might actually be regarded as a treatment failure since her original symptom persisted. The depth of the change that she experienced with acupuncture might go unnoticed because it involved the quality of her life, which is difficult to measure.

In so many ways we find that Western scientific and Eastern energetic medical models can each be effective in just the areas where the other is lacking (which is why *complementary medicine* is more accurate than the oppositional term, *alternative medicine*). We can see how this may work in chronic conditions such as hypertension where biomedicine is able to prescribe medications to successfully lower blood pressure, preventing serious complications. Because the disease is referred to as *idiopathic* (which means the cause is unknown), it is not surprising that the source of the problem remains untreated. In this situation, herbs and acupuncture can be effective interventions to address a deeper level—here, the excess tension within the body—with the goal of reducing or eliminating the reliance on drugs. The experience in China, where practitioners of Western and Eastern methods work side by side, has been quite illuminating in this respect. As an example, in the treatment of certain cancers chemotherapy and radiation are used to eradicate the tumor, while acupuncture, herbs, and *ch'i kung* exercises are prescribed to decrease side-effects of treatment and to support the immune system and the patient in general. There are specific herbs, for instance, that can be used to nourish the ability of the body to form blood, a function that is particularly hard hit by aggressive biomedical therapy.

Another arena in which scientific and traditional methods can be mutually supportive is in the treatment of infertility. In many cases, state-of-the-art technology can place a fertilized egg in the woman's uterus, yet fail to achieve the desired goal. What is typically not considered is the human factor in pregnancy: receptivity, openness, and the ability to nurture. These qualities, critical to this natural process, are often lost to both men and women in our fast-paced, modern world. In fact, the sterile atmosphere and focus on results that is a part of the Western approach creates an anxiety that

works in just the opposite direction. Five Element acupuncture, through drawing upon images from nature and encouraging us to think metaphorically, offers the insight that the energy of the Earth must be embodied for new life to take hold. In my experience, treatments that reinforce such positive images, both through visualizations and acupuncture, can complement scientific techniques and lead to a more favorable outcome. In addition, addressing the situation with a more balanced, inclusive therapy may benefit a person in ways that extend beyond the immediate concern; in this example potential parents may, if needed, come back in touch with the ability to slow down and flow with life. It is evident that the blending of modern biomedicine with ancient models holds great promise and remains, to date, largely unexplored.

In Chinese medicine we have a prototype for wholistic healing. Committed to uncovering the energetic pattern that underlies the symptoms, its very framework directs us to a wider vision in our quest for health. Therapeutic modalities also encompass a full range of experience, in that they extend beyond acupuncture needles and herbs to include nutrition, physical exercises, massage, and meditation. However, as we explore the positive attributes of Eastern methods, it is important to note that wholistic medicine is not the property of one particular system. This approach is available to anyone who takes the time to uncover the roots of illness, as an in-depth history is essential to this process. A caring, concerned Western-trained health care provider can certainly practice in a way that treats the whole person. Unfortunately, this is not very likely when the average visit under “managed care” is now seven minutes. It is also true that Chinese medicine is frequently applied in a symptomatic, cookbook fashion where acupuncture points are used merely to suppress symptoms, and no effort is made to relate the presenting complaint to the person in whom it is occurring. The crucial factor is whether

the practitioner is present for the patient and allows sufficient time to explore the origins of the dis-ease.

Since health is defined by Western medicine as the absence of pathology, those engaged in its practice can find it frustrating not to have a model for working on improved well-being. This is especially evident in general physical exams where, in the case of basically healthy clients, there is very little to offer aside from ordering expensive tests to rule out illness. On the other hand, diagnosis in Chinese medicine is concerned with subtle energy, addressing imbalances before they become manifest in measurable organic conditions. Diseases that have to do with the workings of the body, labeled *functional* by biomedicine because they have not yet progressed to the point where they show up on x-rays or blood tests, may respond to *energy medicine*. Quite often, problems that are discovered early can be treated through lifestyle interventions. In fact, it is said that in ancient China the practitioner was paid only while the person was well; if the patient became ill, the doctor had to support the family! One can imagine the implications for medical care that would derive from such a radically different financial incentive.

Preventive medicine is clearly the highest priority in the Chinese tradition, as illustrated by this passage from *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* (*Nei Ching Su Wen*):

The sages did not treat those who were already ill; they instructed those who were not yet ill. . . . To administer medicines to diseases which have already developed is comparable to the behavior of those persons who begin to dig a well after they have become thirsty, and of those who begin to cast weapons after they have already engaged in battle. Would these actions not be too late?⁸

Compare this with the words of Moses Maimonides, the most renowned Jewish physician of the Middle Ages: "The ability of a

physician to prevent illness is a greater proof of his skill than his ability to cure someone who is already ill.”⁹ When such strikingly similar ideas are found in different times and places, it is an indication that we are dealing with universal themes that are fundamental to the human condition.

One of the most valuable gifts that Chinese medicine offers the West is a positive vision of wellness. Based upon the ancient teaching that the highest ideal is to live in harmony with the rhythms of the natural world, it is a view that encourages flowing with the stream of life, instead of swimming against the current. According to this philosophy, health is optimized when we follow the laws of nature, including our own inner nature; illness arises when we lose our relationship with the original order of things. These ideas are considered to have been handed down from antiquity, attributed to the Yellow Emperor. The classic text that carries his name is a compendium of wisdom that has served as the cornerstone of Chinese medicine throughout the ages. In it we find these timeless principles:

Those who rebel against the basic rules of the universe sever their own roots and ruin their true selves. *Yin* and *yang*, the two principles in nature, and the four seasons are the beginning and the end of everything and they are also the cause of life and death. Those who disobey the laws of the universe will give rise to calamities and visitations, while those who follow the laws of the universe remain free from dangerous illness, for they are the ones who have obtained *Tao*, the Right Way.¹⁰

All medical systems share a common concern for the well-being of the patient and ask a similar quality from the practitioner, a *mind of caring*. It has been said that “the world of medicine may be compared to an orchestra, where each section serves a particular function and complements the others to complete the whole.”¹¹ Only through working together can we approach health care in a way that

treats all levels, *body, mind, and spirit*. There is beautiful music to be played, a creative expression that will require a full range of skills from many traditions and can, on a larger scale, also support the healing of this planet.

In studying Chinese medicine we find ourselves on a path that leads from the complexities of modern life back to the simplicity of nature. The rewards extend far beyond learning new medical techniques to suppress symptoms. This is a journey that holds the potential for a more in-depth healing, as we examine the energies of life and come to know our inner selves. Only as we become more whole within are we then in a position to assist others in their struggles and to address the core issues underlying the problems of our modern world. Indeed, the true role of Chinese medicine in the West is “to help society, in general, rediscover its natural roots.”¹²

NOTES

1. Jefferson Starship, “Ride the Tiger,” on *At Their Best* (New York: BMG Music, 1993).
2. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 24.
3. I can report a personal experience that showed the effectiveness of this particular treatment. When my wife was pregnant with our third child, an ultrasound demonstrated a breech presentation. Moxibustion to the point Bladder 67, located on the outside aspect of the little toe, caused profound movement within the uterus that very night and, at a follow-up visit the next day, our daughter had indeed turned to the more favorable head-down position.
4. “Alternative Medicine Meets Science,” *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 280 (November 11, 1998): p. 1619.
5. I have chosen in this book to use the spelling *wholistic*, rather than the form that has been more commonly adopted: *holistic*. This is done intentionally to emphasize the root from which the word is derived, which has the same origin as the word *wholeness*. So often, a door is

opened to healing simply through a willingness to embrace the wholeness of the human condition.

6. At a recent conference I attended on cardiovascular disease, a study was presented that indicated the best predictor of heart attack risk was not LDL cholesterol levels, blood pressure readings, or any other measurable quantities, but whether a person is in a happy marriage. Once again, the most important influences seem to be the intangible ones.
7. C. G. Jung, "Yoga and the West," in *Psychology and the East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 80.
8. *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, trans. Ilza Veith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 105.
9. Fred Rosner, M.D, *Maimonides Medical Writings* (Haifa, Israel: The Maimonides Research Institute, 1990).
10. *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, pp. 104–105.
11. Professor J. R. Worsley, Introduction to acupuncture training, Leamington Spa, England, 1978.
12. Bob Duggan, Speech at the Traditional Acupuncture Institute, Columbia, Maryland, 1985.

CHAPTER 2

Ch'i

The Breath of Heaven

An eye is meant to see things.
The soul is here for its own joy.
Mysteries are not to be solved:
The eye goes blind when it only wants to see why.¹

—Rumi

To the ancient Chinese, life arises from the meeting of heaven and earth. “The breath of heaven,” known as *ch'i*, descends in order to animate the material world. Our existence thus becomes much more than just a physical reality, as it is fundamentally infused by a spiritual dimension. Life is then understood to be the silent flow of vital energies within a concrete and tangible environment. This is an image of great balance in the cosmic forces, as set forth in the classic texts:

Whenever Heaven initiates life, breath (energy) is sent to Earth. Earth obediently receives and transforms, developing unceasingly the forms that correspond to the endless creative movement of Heaven.²

Throughout the history of Western culture we find a parallel understanding of *breath* as the way in which heaven influences life on earth. In *Genesis*, for example, there is the well-known passage that describes the creation of human beings:

And God formed man, dust of the ground, and breathed the breath of life into his countenance, and so man became a living personality.³

氣
Ch'i

The Hebrew word *ruach*, found in the Bible and translated as spirit, can also mean *breath*. Similarly, the ancient Greeks used the word *pneuma* to refer to both wind and spirit. Italian Renaissance art offers a beautiful image for the life breath of the Lord. *The Birth of Venus*, by Botticelli, depicts Zeus blowing onto Venus as she is born from a clam shell. And a metaphor from the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke reminds us that

True singing is a different breath, about nothing.
A gust inside the god. A wind.⁴

These similar expressions reveal that widely different traditions recognized *breath* as a symbol that can help describe what is essentially a mystery: the manifestation of the spirit in the world.

The image of “the breath of heaven” derives naturally from living close to the elements. Tribal people around the world who are intimately involved with nature on a daily basis invariably have a strong sense of their heavenly origins. Often referred to as the Great Spirit, they are in relationship with an archetypal image that brings quality and purpose to their endeavors. Instead of the isolation that typically characterizes the modern individual who assumes his ego to be running the show, a person steeped in spiritual experience has a connection to the Infinite. Though ultimately ineffable, the ability to draw upon a transpersonal realm in one’s daily life is a very real source of richness and beauty. Most importantly, it allows a trust in destiny and in forces beyond our control. This offers a meaning to events, which is no small feat. Witness this expression of faith that comes out of the Ojibway Native American tradition:

Sometimes I go about pitying myself,
and all the time
I am being carried on great winds across the sky.⁵

Ch'i, the energy underlying life, is the starting point for any true exploration of Chinese medicine because it is the foundation upon which this tradition is based. An awareness of the presence of a vital force appears everywhere in this approach to health care. Symptoms are seen as manifestations of a disharmony in the internal energy, while treatment is directed at restoring its smooth flow, bringing balance and health. Addressing disturbances at this formative level, before they manifest in organic disease, allows acupuncture to work effectively at preventing illness. This medical system, as handed down from antiquity, understood human existence to extend beyond the material dimension, and it is the presence of *ch'i* that truly makes us spiritual beings. Though we cannot observe this life force directly, we can assess its effect through diagnostic methodology that evolved over the centuries, such as the highly refined system of pulse diagnosis that allows the practitioner to directly palpate twelve distinct energies along the radial artery. The ability to evaluate realities that cannot be physically measured is grounded in the teachings of the *I Ching*, the ancient source of wisdom revered by all religions of China:

The wind blows over the lake and stirs the surface of the water.
Thus visible effects of the invisible manifest themselves.⁶

We find that the models of Chinese philosophy consistently provide images of wholeness and completion. When we speak of the *ch'i* and contrast it to the physical body, we are making a *yin/yang* differentiation: the body is *yin*, belonging to the world of form; the energy is *yang*, and is formless. Western medicine deals with more material realities and, in this analogy, would be considered *yin*; Eastern medicine addresses the energetic realm, and would be *yang*. Since it represents the influence of heaven on earth,

working with *ch'i* in Chinese medicine permits us to integrate the form and the formless. The symbol traditionally used to depict this interrelationship is the bamboo flute. The wooden shape provides the substrate, the environment in which the sound can occur. But it is the breath that brings the flute to life, fulfilling its purpose.

To appreciate the value of paying attention to the energy level, imagine a situation where you are with a friend who recently discovered that his partner is leaving to be with another person. Trying to be sympathetic, you attempt to comfort him with the statement, "That's awful, you must be angry." Then, in a loud, shouting voice, he replies, "I'M NOT ANGRY!" Though the words may deny it, obviously, your friend is furious. If you were to focus merely on the concrete content of the response, the truth would be missed. In this scenario, it is the sound of the voice (shouting) that is the key to *the energy of the moment*. We all instinctively pay attention to such discrepancies in signals and recognize them to be clues that provide a more accurate insight into what is really going on. As we will see, the sound, along with the color, odor, and emotion, are the cornerstones of Five Element diagnosis, allowing us to read the *ch'i* according to this time-honored understanding.

This concept of a life force is universally found in systems of medicine that incorporate a vision of treating the whole person in *body/mind/spirit*. Traditional herbal remedies, such as the use of Capsicum (cayenne) to stimulate energy in the fight against infection, work in this way. Unfortunately, most herb books rarely go beyond prescriptions to suppress symptoms. In the realm of bodywork, there is a definite need to address a person's underlying energy, and treatments that focus only on the physical level tend to leave the recipient with a feeling of being unfulfilled. Yet central to hands-on approaches such as Shia Tzu, Polarity, Cranial-Sacral technique, Trager, Breema, and Zero Balancing is the teaching that the deepest

stratum of the individual can be influenced through the structure. Here it is the *ch'i* that is being attended to by the practitioner.

The Western modality that is most focused on vital energy, and therefore closely akin to Chinese medicine, is homeopathy. Developed by the German physician Hahnemann two centuries ago, this system prescribes minute quantities of the very substance that would normally produce the identical symptoms as the presenting condition, if ingested in larger amounts. (The prefix “homeo” means similar.) For example, inhaling onion produces nasal discharge and watery eyes and, in the appropriate dose, can be used to treat respiratory congestion. Likewise, coffee is a homeopathic remedy for insomnia. In contrast to biomedicine (also known as allopathy), where treatments are directed at suppressing the expressions of disease (the prefix “allo” means different), homeopathy assumes there to be wisdom behind the body’s array of symptoms. It seeks to encourage this response pattern, based on the idea that “like cures like.” This same principle is operating, for example, when we find that listening to Blues music relieves sadness or having a good cry eases depression. Although the homeopathic prescription is often so dilute that there are scarcely any molecules left, by using a highly potentiated form it is the *essence* of the material that is actually being administered. In this way, the therapeutic effect comes from “the spirit hidden in matter” and is aimed at the energy imbalance that lies beneath the symptoms. It is said that Abraham Lincoln once described homeopathy as “trying to fertilize a field with a fart,” a comment that indicates he may not have had a true appreciation of the theory behind this system of medicine.

All of these wholistic approaches share the idea that an *energy body* exists that governs the function and health of our physical body. The genius of the Chinese system is that it is able to define this vital force far more precisely than most other methods are able

to do. What the ancient Chinese discovered in the acupuncture model is, literally, the anatomy of the *energy body*. The meridians are maps of the pathways through which the *ch'i* flows in our bodies. The acupuncture points themselves are places where we can contact and influence the energy in specific ways, depending on the point selected. The models of *yin/yang* and the Five Elements provide us with ways to describe how the *ch'i* functions, and may be thought of as the physiology of the life energy.

This concept of vital energy can help us elucidate the nature of the healing process. Health may be understood as a fullness of *ch'i*; death, in contrast, as its absence. When there is a state of deficiency, presenting with fatigue, lethargy, and depression, most people would look to restore balance with stimulating treatments. Whereas amphetamines, cocaine, or self-medicating with large amounts of caffeine may indeed temporarily pick up the level of activity, in the end they are bound to decrease the life force. On the other hand, tonifying the person with acupuncture, herbs, *ch'i kung* movements, or aerobic exercise, though slower to take effect, can bring about a more balanced state while enhancing the energy. Likewise, if presented with an excessive condition manifesting in anxiety, hypertension, and insomnia, the universal tendency is to sedate the person for balance. Here again, opiates, tranquilizers, and self-medicating with alcohol will certainly serve to tone the symptoms down but will, in the end, deplete the life force. The use of calming acupuncture techniques and herbs, meditation, self-hypnosis, or simply adequate rest, has the potential of quieting the hyperactivity and, at the same time, supporting the energy. We can visualize this process with the amount of *ch'i* on the vertical axis and the spectrum from deficient to excessive states on the horizontal axis (Figure 1).⁷



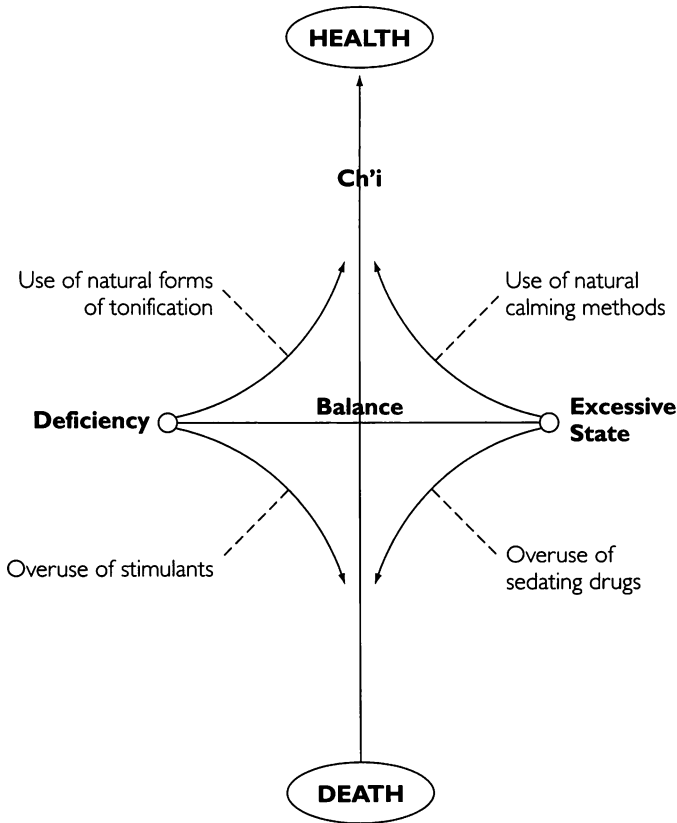


Figure 1. Healing as Enhancement of Life Energy

Within the world of medicine the Western system, built as it is upon scientific knowledge, relies on measurement and addresses the level of the physical body. When diseases lend themselves to this approach, the results can be truly impressive. In chronic conditions, however, the focus on symptoms commonly leads to the underlying pattern being ignored, and the roots of the illness are then left untreated. Eastern medicine, on the other hand, works with *ch'i*, the movement of energy, and addresses another side of our being. The

direction things are taking, the quality rather than the quantity, and the dynamic function of the organism are all the province of this system. The emotional and spiritual life, which in conventional practice is relegated to psychologists, philosophers, and religious leaders and is essentially split off from biomedicine, can be influenced through balancing the internal energy. Again, we find that East or West alone only embraces half of the truth—and each is incomplete without the other. Just as the bamboo flute needs both the material form and the breath to produce a sound, our goal must be to integrate both of these reputable systems of medicine in a complementary fashion.

It is the mystery of *ch'i* that presents the biggest obstacle to a true understanding of the medicine of China by the West. As long as research studies on acupuncture are designed to speak in terms of quantifiable data (the language of science), Western biomedicine reluctantly acknowledges the validity of this ancient practice. Despite clear evidence of its effectiveness, exactly how stimulation of acupuncture points produces these changes remains elusive, as does the nature of the energy pathways in the body. At least for the present time, the working of *ch'i* lies beyond the reach of science. Through a cultural egocentrism that insists on interpreting its theoretical foundation solely in terms of the scientific model, the real power of Chinese medicine remains unrecognized. By refusing to accept that the fundamental explanation for the observed effects is the existence of energy, the West fails to truly grasp this traditional method of healing and misses an opportunity to reconnect with the nonmaterial aspects of life.

This philosophical problem goes far beyond the West's skepticism toward acupuncture: we are touching upon a deep schism that permeates contemporary thinking, separating the human being into

unrelated parts. This polarization has its historical roots centuries ago, when European thought began to emancipate itself from the shackles of religious tradition and the Church lost its leadership in the arena of practical knowledge. When science carved out its realm of influence it paid no attention to the spiritual dimensions of people, thereby ignoring a basic human need. This blind spot has been carried over to the way in which we practice medicine and how we approach the concept of *ch'i*.

Perhaps modern physics will serve as a bridge to help bring East and West together. Through the discovery that matter is really composed of electromagnetic force, and is therefore a transient stage in the ongoing dance of energy, a scientific model is now in place that encompasses the reality of *ch'i*. Einstein's famous equation, $E=MC^2$, gives us a mathematical description of the interrelationship of energy and matter. We find that the discoveries of quantum physics, which are at the forefront of science, are in full accord with the ancient Chinese view. The theory of *yin/yang*, for example, is expressed in the explanation of light as both particle and wave, in the discovery of anti-matter, and in the fact that, to balance the existence of negatively charged electrons, the existence of positrons was predicted long before they were actually discovered. Physicists have come to realize that particles affect each other in ways that defy physical explanations. Concepts such as Bell's theorem postulate that events influence each other, even at great distances, for unknown reasons. Indeed, we live in a relational universe. Since the observer interacts with the experimental field (even if it is atomic particles that are being studied), there is no way to be certain about our observations. If science hinges on the accuracy of measurements, and everything begins to change at the point of being observed, then the nature of reality remains elusive. The conclusion

of quantum theory that the universe is *indeterminate*⁸ is just another way of expressing the mystic's realization that "mysteries are not to be solved" (though they certainly may be explored).⁹

Biomedicine, as currently practiced, is based on the limited worldview of Newtonian physics. As scientific thinking increasingly incorporates the expansive vision of Einstein, there is hope that we can, in time, discard the rigid compartmentalization that now characterizes the world of medicine. The ability to draw upon both physical and energetic models of healing—each where appropriate—will enable us to forge a truly integrated approach to health care that embraces the wholeness of the human experience.



Ch'i

Breathing: you invisible poem! Complete
 interchange of our own
 essence with world-space. You counterweight
 in which I rhythmically happen.
 Single wave-motion whose
 gradual sea I am;
 you, most inclusive of all our possible seas—
 space grown warm.
 How many regions in space have already been
 inside me. There are winds that seem like
 my wandering son.
 Do you recognize me, air, full of places I once absorbed?
 You who were the smooth bark,
 roundness, and leaf of my words.¹⁰

—Rilke

NOTES

1. Rumi, *Open Secret*, versions by John Moyne and Coleman Barks (Vermont: Threshold Books, 1984), p. 28.
2. Claude Larre, *Survey of Traditional Chinese Medicine* (Columbia, Md.: Traditional Acupuncture Foundation, 1986), p. 7.
3. *The Pentateuch*, trans. Samson Hirsch (New York: The Judaica Press, 1990), Genesis 2:7.
4. Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Sonnets to Orpheus," in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 231.
5. Ojibway, *News of the Universe*, ed. Robert Bly (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980), p. 249.
6. *I Ching*, Bollingen Series, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), Hexagram 61, *Inner Truth*, p. 235.
7. Simon Mills, Seminar on Herbology, Mill Valley, California, 1982.
8. Morton Rosen, Discussion at men's group, Santa Cruz, California, March, 2001.
9. Len Beyea, Saturday afternoon conversations, June, 2001.
10. Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), p. 73.

CHAPTER 3

Ancient Chinese Wisdom

Numerology, Patterns in Nature from One to Eight

Though chaos rules on the surface,
in the depths all becomes law.¹

—*Psalm 92*

Albert Einstein once said that the essential question, which each of us must ultimately answer, is whether or not the universe is friendly. This is a distinction that is indeed fundamental, as it pervades our approach to life. Is the world we live in chaotic, without plan or direction, or is there an underlying order that brings with it meaning and purpose? The first assumption is actually the prevailing attitude of modernity, where most people consider themselves too sophisticated to believe in a transcendent reality. Everything then depends on the personal ego, which must forge some semblance of truth out of nothingness. And so we marvel at the inventions of science and technology, worship at the altar of reason, and strive for some measure of security based on individual achievement. Yet, there is no end to human striving and, as long as we are unable to hold to some meaning beyond the material plane, it seems that the whole world is not enough to bring contentment.

In contrast, wisdom traditions ranging from ancient China to Jungian psychology to modern physics have chosen to hold the position that, if one looks deep enough, there is an essential order to things. To see the universe as inherently meaningful allows a person to take comfort in the assurance that all is unfolding according to a higher purpose. The task each of us then faces becomes more like recognizing the inner plan for our lives and giving it expression in the outer world. Neither point of view can be known for certain, as we are speaking of matters of faith that lie beyond the vistas of the human mind. The person who embraces a spiritual dimension is just as right, or just as wrong, as someone who does not believe. However, to live with a sense of connection to something greater than ourselves infuses life with value and direction, and opens us up to the possibility that unimagined energies can influence our journey.

Carl Jung had a real appreciation of the forces at play in the universe, and he knew that “it is important and salutary to speak also of incomprehensible things.”² Exploring the depths of the psyche, he found an abundance of images, full of numinous (spiritual) vibration. Jung called them *archetypes*, a term that can be defined as the universal symbols that are the primal patterns underlying life. Archetypes are what make us truly human; we can speak of the archetype of birth, death, or falling in love. People everywhere would agree on the qualities that constitute the archetype of the Warrior, for example, though the form it takes may vary widely in different times and places.³

Throughout the ages, cultures have developed rituals and told stories in order to bring these potentials to awareness. To live in relationship with this inner world can, in turn, enrich our experience of the outer world, while linking us to the traditions of our ancestors. The discovery that common images are found in myths, art, and dreams across the planet led to Jung’s idea of a *collective unconscious* shared by all people. In place of the Freudian view of the psyche as a reservoir of

repressed memories and sexual impulses, this is a vision that truly unites humankind as one family, under our Father in Heaven and supported by Mother Earth. In searching for the center of our being, Jung uncovered the Self, the archetype of the God image. With characteristic balance, he understood the spirit to exist as both an inner and outer truth. He wrote with reverence of the human soul:

I can only gaze with wonder and awe at the depths and heights of our psychic nature. . . . Beside this picture I would like to place the spectacle of the starry heavens at night, for the only equivalent of the universe within is the universe without.⁴

Jung coined the term *synchronicity* to describe the way events in the cosmos are basically connected and to call attention to the relationship that exists between internal and external realities. Rather than seeing life as a series of accidental occurrences, synchronicity helps us grasp the pattern as a “meaningful coincidence.” This is the best way to approach, for instance, astrology. It is not that the stars determine our destiny, but that the position of the constellations at the instant of birth reflects a pattern that is indicative of the meaning of the moment. It is a pattern that also corresponds to the life story of a person born at that point in time.

In dealing with illness (an inevitable consequence of living in a body), the challenge, especially if the condition is longstanding, is to acquire some insight and use the experience for growth. The concept of synchronicity helps us find the hidden teaching while avoiding the implication, derived from cause-and-effect thinking, that we are somehow at fault for the mishap. In most cases, to take responsibility without feelings of blame is actually closer to the truth of the matter, and is bound to be more useful. To link our struggles to a greater purpose allows us to be “responsible *to* the illness, not *for* the illness.”⁵ This more balanced perspective helps prevent what is perhaps the worst fate of all, meaningless suffering. Over the doorway of

Jung's house was written the Latin inscription: "*Vocatus adque non vocatus, Deus aderit* (called or not called, God is present)."⁶ In this spirit, it can be added that "coincidence is just God's way of staying anonymous."⁷

In traditional cultures, where the worldview is derived from living in harmony with nature, the interplay of events in the universe is self-evident. When it comes to understanding illness, this synchronistic view, epitomized by Chinese medicine, allows us to realize that there is an undeniable connection between inner energetic patterns and presenting symptoms. In the previous chapter, we discussed the concept of *ch'i* as the foundation for a system rooted in observations of the natural world. Sages from the distant past sought to uncover the laws governing the movement of this mysterious force, and constructs based on numerical arrangements evolved in China that elucidate the patterns underlying the energy of life. Now, we will explore these models sequentially, from one to eight.

The *I Ching*, the oldest written source of Chinese philosophy, will be integrated throughout this book, as it provides a guide for choosing "one's point of reference so that it coincides with the point of reference for cosmic events."⁸ By making choices that are in harmony with the forces of nature, the most favorable course can then be followed. Though usually translated as the *Book of Changes*, the basic premise of this timeless classic is that everything is indeed changing, but doing so according to *unchanging laws*. Movement and the principles governing it are one and, to answer Einstein's question, we live in "a cosmos, not a chaos."⁹ As is true in Jungian psychology, the *I Ching* recognizes these laws to be operating both within and without, providing meaning to life's experiences. Here is characteristic advice from this ancient tradition that draws upon the wisdom of the elements in nature:

The fate of fire depends on wood; as long as there is wood below, the fire burns above. It is the same in human life; there is in man likewise

a fate that lends power to his life. And if he succeeds in assigning the right place to life and to fate, thus bringing the two into harmony, [it brings supreme good fortune].¹⁰

TAO: THE UNITY OF ALL THINGS

The *Tao* continually renews everything,
so that each day the world becomes as glorious again
as it was on the first day of creation.¹¹

—*I Ching*



The ancient Chinese had a word for *synchronicity*: they called it *Tao*, the Way. In the *Tao Teh Ching*, the central text of China's mystical religion of Taoism, the author, Lao Tzu, begins with the words, "*Tao* can be talked about, but not the Eternal *Tao*."¹² As the Source, the *one*, the unity behind the myriad forms, the *Tao* connects all of life into a meaningful whole. It is the thought that is beyond all thought, a mystery that can only be revered in silence.

Since the *Tao Teh Ching* is essentially an inquiry into the essence of being, it is fascinating to compare it with investigations from other traditions, notably quantum physics. Research into the origins of sub-atomic particles has reached the conclusion that there is a basic primal simplicity underlying every atom, present at the moment of Creation, and marked indelibly into everything. Compare this viewpoint with the words of Lao Tzu, written some twenty-five hundred years ago:

There was Something undefined and yet complete in itself,
Born before Heaven-and-Earth.
Silent and boundless.
Standing alone without change
Yet pervading all without fail,
It may be regarded as the Mother of the world,
I do not know its name;
I style it *Tao*.¹³

In both understandings, this principle of oneness is not seen as separate from the diverse expressions—i.e., there is no Creator apart from creation. From this perspective, answers to the search for the origins of the universe may be found within oneself, and the way to know the spirit is to live in the world. Though there may be many paths, when we drop deep enough we often find similar realizations.

The practice of Taoism involves freeing oneself from excessive attachments and returning to simplicity. The emphasis on living in harmony with nature finds expression throughout Chinese medicine. The principal teaching of this mystical path is known as *wu wei*, usually translated as *non-doing*. Though it may be thought of as inaction, this concept is more accurately seen as action in harmony with the situation, free of extra layers of ego involvement. We can see this Taoist influence in Zen Buddhism, where it is taught, “When you sit, just sit; when you walk, just walk; above all, don’t wobble.” So often, even on a spiritual quest, we become attached to the outcome and then our efforts only serve to separate us from the flow of the *Tao*. The paradoxical truth that *more* is often *less*, and *less* is *more*, is found throughout the *Tao Teh Ching*, as in the teaching that

Learning consists in daily accumulation;
The practice of *Tao* consists in daily diminishing.
Keep on diminishing and diminishing,
Until you reach the state of No-Ado.
No-Ado, and yet nothing is left undone.¹⁴

Though the *Tao* is invisible and unknowable through the senses, its presence exerts a profound influence, connecting us to a place from which everything is just as it is meant to be. This puts us in touch with a greater plan, which can support an acceptance of whatever life brings without judgment. When facing illness, loss, or even death, it is only from this center that we can avoid labeling events as *good or bad*, and simply allow them to *be*. This then creates the possibility of finding meaning and peace. Here is a teaching

from Chinese Buddhist tradition, written a thousand years after Lao Tzu, that clearly reflects the wisdom of Taoism:

The Way is perfect like vast space
 where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess.
 Indeed, it is due to our choosing to accept or reject
 that we do not see the true nature of things.
 Be serene in the oneness of things
 and such erroneous views will disappear by themselves.¹⁵

The path to the center often involves a bringing together of opposites through which the two become one. This is the symbolic power of marriage, for example, where the male and female merge and a higher union results. Jung, who was primarily interested in the process of transformation, had his own definition of the *Tao* as “the unity of consciousness and life.” Truly, when we live our life in a conscious way, and shine the light of awareness on how we act in the world, then we are in the *Tao*:

She who is centered in the *Tao*
 can go where she wishes, without danger.
 She perceives the universal harmony,
 even amid great pain,
 because she has found peace in her heart.¹⁶

YIN AND YANG: THE BALANCE OF COMPLEMENTARY PAIRS

When I rise up
 let me rise up joyful like a bird.
 When I fall
 let me fall without regret like a leaf.¹⁷

—Wendell Berry

The concept of *Tao* corresponds to the unity underlying all existence, and it is indeed a great source of strength to cultivate a sense

of the undivided wholeness. In order to navigate life in the world, however, we need to make distinctions. When it comes our turn to do the dishes, it simply doesn't work to claim "it's all one." And so the *one* is divided into the *two*, and *yin* and *yang* are born. We find in the Judeo-Christian tradition the same movement from the unknowable Source to the world of duality, as in the opening line of the Bible, where it reads: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth."¹⁸

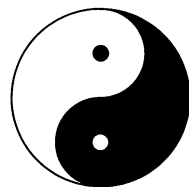
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Yin and Yang

According to ancient wisdom, this model based on the number two enables us to make comparisons and discern "the movements of all creation." Everything can be said to be *yin* or *yang*, relative to its polar complement. Thus, we can contrast dark and light, night and day, cold and hot, water and fire, rest and movement, falling and rising, feminine and masculine—each pair representing a *yin/yang* relationship. Neither is seen as more valuable than the other and, in fact, *yin* and *yang* are inseparable, for each mutually creates the other. The concept of beauty defines the category of ugliness; the idea of winning requires there to be losing.

At the extreme, *yin* and *yang* transform into each other, just as the moon, when full, begins to wane. This principle is depicted visually in the ancient symbol of *yin/yang*. Here we see that when *yang* is at its fullest, the seed of *yin* is born (the dark dot within the white area). Likewise, in the depths of the dark *yin* we find the seed of *yang*. Thus, the ancient Chinese, who understood the value of influencing things at their beginnings, point out that noon is the birth of the nighttime (as this is the point when the light begins to fade), while the winter solstice "brings the victory of the light."¹⁹ The laws of nature teach us that after a time of darkness there will be a dawn, and this simple idea can bring great comfort when facing the kind of suffering that has been called "the dark



night of the soul.” Applying the idea of *yin* and *yang* to human endeavors, we recognize the fluctuation of fortune inherent in the cycles of life, which brings a certain humility. As the ancient Taoists were quick to point out,

Achievement is the beginning of failure.
Fame is the beginning of disgrace.²⁰

The model of *yin* and *yang* can be thought of as a map for understanding energy, and the system known as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) uses *yin/yang* theory as a way to diagnose and treat the *ch'i*. The practitioner seeks to understand the person in terms of Eight Principles and defines her condition as deficient or excessive, cold or hot, internal or external, *yin* or *yang*. Steps are then taken to restore balance and harmony. An example based on this approach is the individual who experiences hypertension, anxiety, insomnia, restlessness, and feelings of heat in the body—symptoms that can be diagnosed as an excessive *yang* condition. Treatment would include acupuncture points and herbs aimed at quieting and sedating the hyper energy. This pattern can be contrasted with the typical menopausal syndrome, when the ovaries stop producing female hormones, a situation that can be interpreted to be a depletion of *yin*. The symptoms of hot flashes, irritability, and insomnia are indeed reminiscent of the first case. The cause, however, lies in the lack of hormones (fluids), and what initially appeared to be an abundance of *yang* in the body is really only a *relative* excess that is actually due to a deficiency of *yin*.²¹ This distinction is crucial if we are to direct treatment to the root of the problem. Here, the more effective intervention would be to select the acupuncture points and herbs that build and nourish the *yin* side and, in this way, restore the balance.

As we have seen, energy can be considered *yang*, while matter is *yin*. In the Chinese classics *ch'i* is actually defined as “the action of *yang* at the level of the body.” To take this discussion a step further, the *I Ching* describes two fundamental principles: the Creative and the Receptive. The Creative is the formless spirit, the inspiration that is the force for change, and is classified as *yang*. The Receptive, in contrast, is the material manifestation, the form that is the expression in the world, and belongs to *yin*. To know the Creative is to influence the first beginning of movement, yet without the Receptive nothing would be brought to birth. Each complements the other; both are needed for wholeness:

The Creative acts in the world of the invisible, with spirit and time for its field, the Receptive acts upon matter in time and space and brings material things to completion.²²

These distinctions deepen our appreciation of energetic approaches to healing. In Jungian psychology, the archetype, the universal image within the psyche, is clearly of the Creative principle. How this potential is expressed in a person's life belongs to the Receptive. In Chinese medicine we seek to influence the *ch'i*, the invisible movement of life energy, which belongs to the Creative. The presence or absence of symptoms is seen as a reflection of this deeper force and can be considered as corresponding to the Receptive principle.

The movement between *yin* and *yang* reveals a cardinal principle of Chinese medicine—that of balance. Whenever there is a one-sidedness, it goes against the natural order of things. Any extreme upsets the harmony of *yin* and *yang*, and so we find that success, as well as failure, can lead to illness. Health is seen to derive from a flow between rest and activity, play and work, relationship and solitude, material concerns and spiritual awareness. A vital part of the practi-

tioner's task is to use this model to counsel the client, in order to help him find the unique, balanced expression for his life. Ultimately, even health and illness, as well as life and death, are unavoidable—part of the rhythm of nature, the dance of *yin* and *yang*.

Sagely teaching from around the world typically advises moderation in behavior; in Buddhism, for instance, this is referred to as “following the middle way.” The model of *yin/yang* certainly leads to the same conclusion. Striving for some ideal of perfection ends up pushing the qualities we dislike further into what Jung has called the *shadow*, and this inadvertently lends them power. Through the psychological mechanism of *projection*, we then tend to see these disavowed aspects in others. In the end, we can become the very evil we are trying to eradicate, as witnessed historically in moral crusades and war, and in the state of world politics today.²³ It would be far better to navigate a middle course that allows embracing all sides of human experience. As the thirteenth-century Sufi poet Rumi has said, “Good and bad are mixed; if you don’t have both, you don’t belong with us.”²⁴ In the words of the Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu,

The person who wants to have right without wrong,
Order without disorder,
Does not understand the principles of heaven and earth.
He does not know how things hang together.
Can a person cling only to heaven and know nothing of earth?
They are correlative: to know one is to know the other.
To refuse one is to refuse both.²⁵

The origin of *yin/yang* philosophy can be found in the *I Ching*. When Buddhism spread from India to China two thousand years ago, it blended with indigenous traditions. Merging with the mystical, nature-based religion of Taoism, it produced a great flourishing of culture during the T'ang dynasty (618-906 C.E.). The vital

synthesis that was created from these two great religions was later to evolve into Zen. The Buddhist focus on meditation also brought with it an emphasis on stillness and withdrawal from the world that has heavily influenced Chinese spiritual practices to this day. Yet, to uncover the original Chinese view, the *I Ching*, which is always mindful of *yin* and *yang*, remains our purest source. This excerpt from the hexagram entitled *Keeping Still, Mountain*, the symbol of inner peace, illustrates the sense of balance inherent in the wisdom of ancient China:

True quiet means keeping still when the time has come to keep still, and going forward when the time has come to go forward. In this way rest and movement are in agreement with the demands of the time, and there is light in life.²⁶

HEAVEN-EARTH-MAN: THE ROLE OF HUMAN BEINGS IN THE COSMIC ORDER

Life flows between Heaven and Earth.

At their junction, Man is permanently initiated by Heaven.

Incubated by Heaven, he is born by Earth."²⁷

—Father Claude Larre

天
人
地

T'ien (Heaven)
Jen (Man)
Ti (Earth)

The model of Heaven-Earth-Man²⁸ provides a way to bring order to the universe based on the number *three*. Handed down from antiquity, it describes the relationship of the human being to heaven above and earth below. Since heaven is an expression of the *yang* principle, while earth relates to *yin*, we have in this concept an elaboration of *yin* and *yang* with humans living in between.

Throughout Chinese culture there is a strong sense of the proper relationship of these three aspects. For example, in landscape

paintings we observe the small figures amidst the vast mountains and sky, indicating the modesty which characterized the artist's perspective of the human being's place in the cosmos. Chinese poetry, as well, is rich in images that express our fundamental connection to heaven and earth. Here is a delightful verse by the T'ang Dynasty poet Li Po:

To wash and rinse our souls of their age old sorrows,
 We drained a hundred jugs of wine.
 A splendid night it was . . .
 In the clear moonlight we were loath to go to bed,
 But at last drunkenness overtook us;
 And we laid ourselves down on the empty mountain,
 The *earth* for pillow, and the great *heaven* for coverlet.²⁹

Heaven-Earth-Man contains a great deal of wisdom for the art of living, an art that was consciously cultivated in ancient China. Aware of the need to reach up to the sky for spirit, at the same time these teachings also stress the importance of keeping one's feet firmly planted on the ground. In this way we can maintain balance and not topple over. Without the heavens there is no inspiration, no quality to life. Without the earth, nothing is brought to manifestation. Unlike some religions that deny the body, in this tradition there can be no true spiritual expression apart from life in the world. In Chinese medicine there are specific acupuncture points that can be treated to support this relationship.³⁰ The point known as *the Heavenly Pivot* (Stomach 25) allows the patient to move freely between heaven and earth; *the Heavenly Well* (Three Heater 10) is used to plant the heavenly energy deep within a person's Earth, so that life may be infused with a spiritual influence.

The model of three is basic to Chinese philosophy; whenever we come across an arrangement based on this number, we can

deepen our understanding by comparing it to Heaven-Earth-Man. For instance, we have encountered the concept of *body/mind/spirit* as a way to describe the wholeness of the human experience. Here we have a clear correspondence of the *body* to Earth, the *spirit* to Heaven, and the *mind*, which is the middle level, to Man. The ancient Chinese also refer to “the Three Treasures” in human life. These are *jing*, translated as vital-essence, which is the genetic potential received from our parents; *shen*, the spirit that is stored in the Heart; and *ch’i*; the energy. We can see that *jing*, since it is the material substrate that determines the limits of life, corresponds to Earth. *Shen* comes from Heaven and is the influence that allows us to be born as spiritual beings. In this analogy, *ch’i*, the life force itself, belongs to the level of Man.

Thinking in terms of triads also offers insight into the nature of the healing process. The source of healing, which is ultimately a mystery, belongs to the spiritual realm and represents Heaven. The patient, in whom the changes manifest, corresponds to Earth. The practitioner holds the role of Man in this analogy, standing between the poles of Heaven and Earth and bringing them into relationship. Through this construct we can appreciate how the health care provider is not the origin of the healing, but rather serves as a vehicle or conduit that allows universal energies to influence the person receiving the therapy. In this way we can avoid excessive ego attachment (as represented by the statement, “I am the healer”) and keep from being inflated in the treatment room.

Awareness of the laws of nature makes sense out of the cosmic order and gives meaning to life. Heaven-Earth-Man, a model that is part of the foundation of ancient Chinese thinking, enables us to understand the individual in relationship to the universe around. By living according to this eternal principle, a human being has the potential to become the means by which “the will of heaven” finds expression in the world.

THE NUMBER FOUR: ORGANIZING TIME AND SPACE

Man follows the ways of Earth,
The Earth follows the ways of Heaven,
Heaven follows the ways of Tao,
Tao follows its own ways.
Thus, Man is one of the great four in the Universe.³¹

—Lao Tzu

The number *four* is central to several constructs from ancient China. The four directions oriented space according to points on the compass and, in pursuit of spiritual adventure, pilgrimage was made to Four Holy Mountains. In the old texts there are other references to four in nature, such as Heaven, Earth, Sun, and Moon. When the *I Ching* is consulted as a guide, it is traditional to speak of Heaven, Earth, Sage, and Oracle. And, we find that the earliest arrangement of the elements was organized according to the number four, with one season assigned to each of the elements.

The elemental model for understanding life stems from the beginning of Chinese civilization. It is said to have originated with Fu Hsi, who is considered one of the holy sages of China. Others revered in this way include Huang Ti (The Yellow Emperor), whom we met earlier as the originator of acupuncture, and Shen Nung, who was the first to use herbs and agriculture. It matters little that these three may never have existed as historical personalities. They symbolize the wisdom of antiquity and provide a mythological richness to Chinese philosophy. The story goes that, while sitting by the Yellow River, Fu Hsi had a vision of a horse rising out of the waters. On its side was an arrangement of images that became known as the Yellow River Map. From that moment on, the elements of nature have been inseparable from Chinese culture, exerting a unique and inspirational influence throughout the ages (Figure 2).

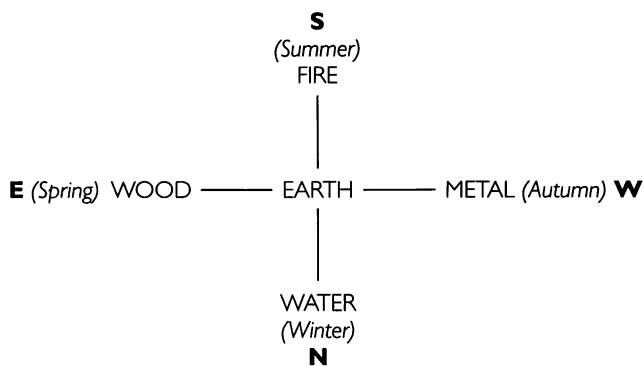


Figure 2. The Yellow River Map

As with the models discussed previously, there exists the possibility of using this map for navigating the world around us. Each of the elements can be assigned to one of the four directions, thereby organizing space, with Wood in the east and Metal in the west, Fire in the south and Water in the north.³² The Earth element assumes the central position, upon which everything rests. In a similar fashion, the elements can be associated with each of the four seasons, bringing order to time: Wood with spring and Metal with the autumn, Fire with summer and Water with the winter. Once again we find Earth in the place of the center, encompassing them all. In the Chinese calendar, there is a transition time as we move between each season, and this period is considered an expression of the Earth element. The fundamental principle of early Chinese philosophy was *yin/yang*, and the Yellow River Map, built as it is on pairs of opposites, is clearly consistent with this approach.

It is illuminating to draw comparisons to other models based on the number *four*. Ancient traditions in the Americas also aligned the four seasons and the four directions, and associated them with the elements as a means of organizing both time and space. Like the Chinese, many Native Americans used a map based on the natural

world to provide insights into the human condition, as in this description of the stages of life:

The East [symbolizes] the start of life's journey, the new day; it is the place of beginnings, first light—and the possibility of starting again. The South holds the warmth of summer; it is a time of learning and growth. The West reminds us of the wisdom of maturity with the approach of the sunset; it is the time to teach, acknowledge, and give thanks. The North holds that hard, cleansing wisdom of the time of winter and white hair; the elder's breath through the sacred pipe, the grandparents who, on life's great circle, are closest to the little children.³³

The similarity between this passage and the arrangements of the elements that emerged from China is quite impressive. The likeness of images that are expressed independently around the world is an indication that they stem from the collective unconscious, arising spontaneously whenever human beings dive into the depths of life experience.

The elements Fire, Air, Water, and Earth are part of the Western European heritage, playing a major role in astrology,³⁴ where they are seen to correspond to four levels of experience: spirit, mind, emotions, and body, respectively. Though each element in the Chinese model is generally understood to influence all aspects of human function, it is useful to explore their particular relationships to these separate levels as a way to compare systems. Fire and Water appear in both arrangements and share similar associations with the spirit and emotional realms. The Earth element also exists in both formulations and can be considered a symbol of the physical level. As we examine the Eastern understanding of the elements in greater depth, we will find that Metal has strong connections with the mind level, and in many ways relates most closely to Air in European astrology. Wood (the symbol for growth and all living things) is then

the “extra” element for the Chinese, with no obvious counterpart in the four-element model from the Western tradition.³⁵

Carl Jung developed a system of personality types that has been widely adopted as a description of behavioral dynamics.³⁶ The functions of intuition, thinking, feeling, and sensation can also be related to this same sequence of four elements: Fire, Metal (Air), Water, and Earth. Understanding these modes of human expression in an elemental context expands our insight into the unique ways that an individual deals with the world.

In the Kabbalah, the system of Jewish mysticism handed down through the ages, the number four plays a primary role. The Tree of Life, an image that symbolizes the attributes of God and the destiny of Man, is organized into Four Worlds and is linked to the four letters of the sacred Name, YHVH. The highest level of Emanation, the unfolding of the Divine Will, is seen as corresponding to the Fire element; the world of Creation represents the intellect, and is considered an aspect of Air (or the Metal element for the Chinese); the third level, the world of Formation, is an expression of the emotional realm, and relates to Water; and the world of action, “the practical implementation of all that has gone before,”³⁷ is connected to the Earth element. There are four expressions of spiritual practice: mystical perception, contemplation, devotion, and ritual, which are associated with each of the worlds. The universality of these models, as well as the parallels between the different traditions, speaks to the deep level of human existence from which they emanate.

MODELS OF FIVE, SIX, AND SEVEN

How do I know about the world?

By what is within me.³⁸

—*Lao Tzu*

The limitation of an elemental map built on the number four is that it is too static. With the outside elements in perfect balance, and Earth in the center around which everything else revolves, the system lacks movement. Without tension and change, it fails to express the dynamism inherent in the process of life. A major shift in the configuration of the elements occurred in China at the beginning of the Chou dynasty (around 1150 B.C.E.), when the Earth element was moved out to the periphery, between Fire and Metal. The elements then assumed a circular relationship based on the number *five*, which is how we apply them in Five Element acupuncture today (Figure 3). Five is a number that is inherently connected to movement and, since the energy of life exists in movement, this model of the Five Elements works well to describe *ch'i*. Through this arrangement, the elements come alive and may best be understood as “the Five Phases of Change.”³⁹ It is this model that will be the focus of our journey throughout this book.

Within Jungian psychology there are any number of systems for organizing the archetypal energies. In chapter 9, we will explore one possible approach that identifies five primary archetypes within the collective unconscious: the Warrior, Lover, King, Queen, and Sage. These images share rich associations with the Five Elements from the Chinese model.

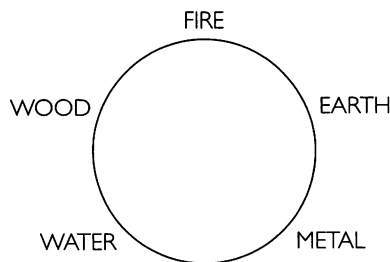


Figure 3. The Circular Arrangement of the Elements

Six was seen as the number of currents that are exchanged between heaven and earth, so that the human realm was sometimes called “the junction of the six breaths” (an image derived from the model of Heaven-Earth-Man). Through the spiritual influence of “the breath of heaven,” the world of form becomes infused with life. The movement of *ch’i* within the body is then classified according to these breaths into Six Great Heavenly Meridians. Each of these flows consists of two pathways, which accounts for a total of twelve main meridians in the body. The *Shang Han Lun*, a text of great importance in the evolution of Chinese medicine, describes the six stages of the invasion of illness from most external (*yang*) to most internal (*yin*), and this becomes the basis of another therapeutic system for applying acupuncture and herbs.

In Chinese medicine, the number *seven* refers to the Internal and External Causative Factors of disease, which will be described in chapter 6. Seven is also the organizing principle behind a specific treatment, originating from Korean acupuncture, that deals with the situation involving *possession* by one of these aspects. In this esoteric approach, a single causative factor is seen to become demonic, literally taking over a person so that he loses control of his own self. Since the internal causes correspond to the emotions, these cases include people who are possessed by anger, grief, fear, etc. Through a combination of seven specific acupuncture points, the practitioner can release seven dragons to gobble up these seven potential demons. In this Asian version of exorcism, the destructive aspect is purged and the individual regains control of his being.

The most famous system of seven used for spiritual growth is undoubtedly the Seven Chakras. Coming out of India, this image of an internal “lotus ladder”⁴⁰ describes a progressive development from the primordial instincts to the loftiest expressions of the human being. The goal in yoga practice is to move the *kundalini*

energy up the spine, activating ever-higher centers of energy. Several different models exist for comparing the chakras to the Chinese Five Elements.⁴¹

THE EIGHT TRIGRAMS OF THE *I CHING*: THE SOUL OF CHINESE MEDICINE⁴²

Since the laws of heaven and earth are reproduced
in the Book of Changes, man is provided with the
means of shaping his own nature, so that his
inborn potentialities for good can be completely
realized.⁴³

—*I Ching*

Use of the *I Ching* extends back to the dawn of Chinese civilization and is considered to have taken its present form with King Wen, the founder of the Chou dynasty. Predating Taoism and Confucianism by some 600 years, both of these traditions look to the book as a compendium of the earliest teachings of the ancestors. Over the millennia the text continued to evolve, as layers of commentaries were added, most notably by Confucius.

China's great leaders have invariably drawn inspiration from the *I Ching*, turning to it with a dual purpose. In time of rest, it can be read as a book of wisdom, a rich source to expound the unchanging laws of the universe. For example, in the hexagram *Limitations* we read: "In nature there are fixed limits for summer and winter, day and night, and these limits give the year its meaning."⁴⁴ But the power of this ancient classic lies in its ability to apply these principles in a practical way:

In human life too the individual achieves significance through discrimination and the setting of limits. . . . Unlimited possibilities are not suited to man; if they existed, his life would only dissolve in the

易經
I Ching

boundless. To become strong, a man's life needs the limitations ordained by duty and voluntarily accepted.⁴⁵

Approaching the *I Ching* as a source of wisdom can be an ally in the treatment room, where readings can be shared that speak to a client's unique situation. For example, I have found the above quote to be particularly valuable since my medical practice is in California, "the land of unlimited possibilities."

The second traditional use of the *I Ching* is found in time of action, when the book is consulted as an oracle.⁴⁶ Here the passages become a guide to the pattern underlying any situation, allowing us to act in harmony with present circumstances. Based on the idea of synchronicity, the specific lines that are received reveal the meaning of the moment, and "the first imperceptible beginning of movement, the first trace of good fortune (or misfortune) that shows itself."⁴⁷ This opens the way for aligning oneself with the workings of fate and, by flowing with the course of events, achieving the most favorable outcome:

To know the seeds, that is divine indeed. . . . The superior man perceives the seeds and immediately takes action. He does not wait even a whole day.⁴⁸

In the distant past, the simplest oracle that originated in China allowed two answers: yes or no, indicated by a *yang* solid line (—) or a *yin* broken line (— —), respectively. In order to address more complex situations, these lines were combined into pairs, creating 2² or four possibilities: == == == ==. The addition of a third line produced 2³ or *eight* combinations, generating the trigrams, which are the basic building blocks of the *I Ching*.⁴⁹ Their origin is generally attributed to Fu Hsi, the mythical personality who also created the first map of the elements. The Eight Trigrams are archetypal

images and, like the Five Elements, can be used as a model for making sense out of the world. Built upon universal symbols that underlie the endless manifestations of life, they hold a significance that endures for all time.

THE EIGHT TRIGRAMS

	Name	Attribute	Image	Family Relationship
☰	<i>Ch'ien</i> the Creative	Strong	Heaven	Father
☷	<i>K'un</i> the Receptive	Devoted, Yielding	Earth	Mother
☳	<i>Chen</i> the Arousing	Inciting movement	Thunder	First son
☵	<i>K'an</i> the Abysmal	Dangerous	Water	Second son
☶	<i>Ken</i> Keeping Still	Resting	Mountain	Third son
☴	<i>Sun</i> the Gentle	Penetrating	Wind, Wood	First daughter
☲	<i>Li</i> the Clinging	Light-giving, Clarity	Fire	Second daughter
☱	<i>Tui</i> the Joyous	Joyful	Lake	Third daughter

When these eight archetypes are arranged in pairs, there are 8×8 combinations of six lines each, and the sixty-four hexagrams of the *I Ching* come into being.⁵⁰ By referring to the above chart and deciphering the relationship between the two trigrams involved, the meaning of each hexagram is revealed. It is through these sixty-four arrangements that the ancient sages uncovered the patterns that lie beneath all the possible situations between heaven and earth. To see how this works, let us look at hexagram 25, *Innocence*, written ☰☷. When we consider the qualities of the two trigrams that compose the hexagram, *Ch'ien*, the Creative (heaven), above and *Chen*, the Arousing (movement), below, we gain an understanding of how the Chinese viewed “innocence” and the closely related concept of *wu wei* (non-doing). The symbols of the trigrams

penetrate into concepts that are difficult to grasp with the thinking mind alone:

When movement follows the law of heaven, man is innocent and without guile. His mind is natural and true, unshadowed by reflection or ulterior designs. For whatever conscious purpose is to be seen, there the truth and innocence of nature have been lost.⁵¹

If one wishes to consult the *I Ching* as an oracle, the hexagram that is received is studied in order to uncover what can be learned from any particular moment. In some instances the answer may seem obscure, at other times the text can speak with amazing precision. When my wife was pregnant with our second child, I threw the *I Ching* and obtained hexagram 24, *Turning Point*, ䷗. Checking the family relationships of the two trigrams on the chart, we find *Chen*, the Arousing, the first son, within *K'un*, the Receptive, the mother (the lower trigram is said to be *within*, the upper *without*). I knew we were going to have a boy! What I didn't know at the time was how much of a turning point my son's birth would be in our lives.

The *I Ching* has been called "the soul of Chinese Medicine."⁵² In Japanese acupuncture, it is one of the basic medical texts, and practitioners consult it regularly to gain insight into a client's illness. In a companion volume entitled *The Medical I Ching*,⁵³ patterns of disharmony and their treatments are associated with each of the sixty-four hexagrams. In the Balancing Method of Richard Tan, a technique of acupuncture that is currently quite popular in the United States, and in the French system developed by Mussat, the Eight Trigrams correspond directly to meridian pathways. In much the same way as the elements function in the Five Element model, the trigrams provide the theoretical framework for the selection of acupuncture points in these approaches.

Though specific traditions can be cited that rely heavily on this book, it is in a much more fundamental way that the *I Ching* lies at

the heart of the healing modalities that have evolved in the East. The underlying premise handed down since the time of the Yellow Emperor, upon which the world of Asian medicine is built, is that illness arises from violating the laws of nature. In its description of these laws, their extension to the human condition, and the guidance as to how to live in harmony with them, this timeless resource creates the foundation for whatever method is ultimately applied in the treatment room.

In the *I Ching* we find the seminal expression of the wisdom of ancient China, as well as a guide for inner development. By encouraging us to view the symptom as a teacher, it sets a tone that has permeated the practice of Chinese medicine throughout the ages. In fact, among the many formative teachings to be found within this classic text is perhaps the earliest statement anywhere of the wholistic approach to health. Following is a characteristic passage that inspires us “to make a medicine out of the illness”:

Difficulties and obstructions throw a man back upon himself. While the inferior man seeks to put the blame on other persons, bemoaning his fate, the superior man seeks the error within himself, and through this introspection the external obstacle becomes for him an occasion for inner enrichment and education.⁵⁴

Indeed, in its attitude toward healing and commitment to treat the root of the condition, the *I Ching* truly becomes “the soul of Chinese Medicine.”

NOTES

1. *A Book of Psalms*, adaptations by Stephen Mitchell (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1993), Psalm 92, p. 41.
2. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 300.

3. Many of these insights into the world of the archetypes come from long conversations with my dear friend Wayne Souza. For these sharings I am deeply grateful.
4. C. G. Jung, *Word and Image*, Bollingen Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 229.
5. Stephen Levine, Seminar on Death and Dying, 1984.
6. Miguel Serrano, *C.G. Jung and Herman Hesse, A Record of Two Friendships* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), p. 57.
7. I first heard this quote from Khosrow Khalighi, fellow student in England and acupuncturist in San Francisco.
8. *I Ching*, Bollingen Series, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), "The Great Treatise," p. 281.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 281.
10. *I Ching*, Hexagram 50, *The Caldron*, p. 194.
11. *I Ching*, "The Great Treatise," p. 299.
12. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, trans. John Wu (New York: St. John's University Press, 1961), ch. 1, p. 3.
13. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 25, pp. 33–35.
14. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 48, p. 69.
15. Sengestan, Third Zen Patriarch, *Hsin Hsin Ming: Verses on the Faith Mind*, trans. Richard Clarke (Virginia Beach: Universal Publications).
16. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), ch. 35.
17. Wendell Berry, *Earth Prayers from Around the World*, ed. Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), p. 367.
18. *The Pentateuch*, trans. Samson Hirsch (New York: The Judaica Press, 1990), Genesis 1:1.
19. *I Ching*, Hexagram 24, *The Turning Point*, p. 97.
20. *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, adaptations by Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 1965), p. 115.
21. Thanks to Michael Burton for explicating the role of *yin* deficiency, which is such a prevalent problem in the modern world.
22. *I Ching*, "The Great Treatise," p. 286.
23. At the time of this writing (March 2003), the world stands poised for yet another war in the Middle East, a modern-day crusade that is just one more example of the splitting of *yin* and *yang*. Each camp claims to have God on its side, which then justifies all sorts of atrocities in the name of opposing what is considered evil. The perennial problem of how to deal with the human shadow is highly complex, and beyond the scope of this book. It is worth pointing out that the effectiveness of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. stemmed to a great

extent from their ability to identify and stand up to evil. However, by adopting a strategy of non-violence, they could stay true to their intentions and not inadvertently add to the darkness in the world.

24. Rumi, *Open Secret*, versions by John Moyne and Coleman Barks (Vermont: Threshold Books, 1984), p. 27.
25. *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, p. 88.
26. *I Ching*, Hexagram 52, *Keeping Still, Mountain*, p. 201.
27. Claude Larre, *Survey of Traditional Chinese Medicine* (Columbia, Md.: Traditional Acupuncture Foundation, 1986), p. 56.
28. In order to be consistent with the tradition handed down through the ages, I have used the term “Man” when referring to the triad of “Heaven-Earth-Man.” This concept is, of course, inclusive of both men and women.
29. Li Po, *Taoist Tales*, ed. Raymond Van Over (New York: New American Library, 1973), p. 213 (*italics added*).
30. The acupuncture points are precise locations on the body where we can access the *ch'i*. Through needles, pressure, moxa, or (in modern acupuncture) electrical stimulation, these points can be tonified or sedated to harmonize the flow of energy. There are a total of 360 basic points commonly displayed on acupuncture charts, though there are hundreds of “extra” points taught through oral tradition. The primary points are organized into twelve bilateral meridians that correspond to the Twelve Officials, along with a *yin* pathway on the front of the body (the Conception Vessel) and a *yang* pathway on the back (the Governor Vessel). They are numbered in sequence and named based on the image depicted by the Chinese character, as handed down from ancient teachings. Studying the character in depth provides insight into the function of any specific point, and how it will influence the *body/mind/spirit*.
31. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, trans. John Wu, ch. 25, p. 35.
32. As traditionally drawn, the four directions in the Yellow River Map are in the same relationship as in maps based on the compass, but are turned 180°. This is probably derived from *yin/yang* thinking, as the quality of Fire is rising and that of Water is falling, dictating that these elements be placed at the top and bottom of the diagram, respectively. Fire is then associated with the south, since the sun is in the south, while Water is linked with the north, the place of cold and dark; hence these time-honored positions.
33. Joseph Bruchac, ed., *Native Wisdom* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995).
34. As is well known, the twelve signs of the Zodiac are organized according to the elements. Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius are Fire signs; Gemini,

Libra, and Aquarius correspond to Air; Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces are related to the Water element; and Taurus, Virgo, and Capricorn are considered Earth signs. These associations with the elements create a flavor that strongly influences the meaning of these symbols, especially when they are applied to human characteristics. Jung considered astrology to be the summation of all of ancient psychology, and as an archetypal system it is quite complex. My friend Michael Burton reminds me that, as one begins to explore comparisons with the Chinese model, there are indeed many subtleties (the scope of which lies beyond this discussion).

35. This is not the only approach for comparing the two systems. Since Earth has the unique role of holding the center in Fu Hsi's arrangement, we might seek an analogy that focuses only on the outer four elements. Fire, Metal, and Water then correspond to Fire, Air, and Water in the Western view. As Wood has many associations to the body (for example, fortifying the ligaments and tendons), this may then be considered the element in the Chinese model that holds the same meaning as Earth does in Western astrology.
36. The Meyer-Briggs test, a personality assessment that is used worldwide to evaluate a person's preferred way of interpreting experience, is based on Jung's typology.
37. Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi, *Kabbalah: Tradition of Hidden Knowledge* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), pp.8–9.
38. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, trans. John Wu, ch. 54, p. 77.
39. A number of scholars of Oriental medicine, most notably Manfred Porkert, have suggested that the Chinese characters for the Five Elements, *Wu Hsing*, are more accurately translated as "the Five Phases of Change" or "the Five Movements." They insist that the term "element" is misleading, since it implies a solidified form. As these terms are being used to describe energetic movements, there is indeed wisdom in this point of view. In spite of these arguments, I have elected to retain "element," opting for simplicity. The archetypal nature of the word links it to universal images found in all cultures to describe the basic building blocks of life. This term is also consistent with the tradition transmitted to me through Professor Worsley in England. Throughout this book our approach will be to regard the Five Elements as symbols of the transformation of life's energies and, as such, they are far from static.
40. See Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image*, Bollingen Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 330–391, for an in-depth exploration of the Chakra system.

41. The chakra/element juxtaposition that I like best is the one I first heard from Fritz Smith, in a Zero Balancing seminar in 1980. It works well since it follows the Five Elements in sequence around the circle. The first or root chakra is located at the anus (the colon organ), and is thereby related to the Metal element. The second chakra is at the level of the genitals and, as the center of sexual energy, is clearly associated with Water. The third chakra, situated in the upper abdomen (near the liver organ), is connected with “the will to power,” and symbolizes the same energy as the Wood element. The fourth chakra, the first non-dualistic center, resides in the heart and is associated with the qualities of love and compassion, clearly the realm of Fire. And the fifth chakra, at the level of the throat, is connected with expression, thought, and caring, aspects that we associate with the Earth element. The sixth chakra, located between the eyebrows and the place of clairvoyance, and the seventh chakra, at the crown of the head and a symbol of merging with the Divine, can both be taken to lie beyond the map of the elements.
42. This section was originally published in *The Journal of Traditional Acupuncture*, Spring 1988.
43. *I Ching*, “The Great Treatise,” p. 295.
44. *Ibid.*, Hexagram 60, *Limitation*, p. 231.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
46. The oracle function of the *I Ching* can be engaged through an ancient ritual that involves the division of fifty yarrow stalks. The yarrow was considered a sacred plant in China, and was said to have the same influence in the plant world as a superior person has in the human world. The use of a plant oracle was developed during the Chou dynasty and represented a fundamental cultural shift. In earlier times, animal oracles, such as bone or tortoise shell, were typically employed. The simplest and most common method used today for consulting the oracle consists of three coins that are thrown six times to generate the six lines of the hexagrams. Assigning a 2 to a head and a 3 to a tail, each throw of three coins produces a total of 6, 7, 8, or 9. Receiving an even number generates a *yin* line, while an odd number creates a *yang* line. If there is an extreme situation—that is, a 6 or a 9—it indicates a special changing line, and the entire hexagram transforms into a second one. The six lines of the hexagram are built from the bottom up. A detailed explanation of both the yarrow stalk and coin methods can be found in the appendix of the Wilhelm translation of the *I Ching* on page 721.
47. *I Ching*, “The Great Treatise,” p. 342.

48. *I Ching*, Hexagram 16, *Enthusiasm*, p.70.
49. The Chinese fascination with the power of numbers has had a significance far beyond their own culture. The German mathematician Leibniz derived the binary system of counting, based on the number two, directly from the *yin/yang* structure of the *I Ching*. Since the theoretical basis for computers is this same binary arrangement (as signals are essentially stored in an on-off configuration), our modern computer technology has evolved, in a very real way, from ancient Chinese wisdom.
50. The number 64 is also generated by the fact that there are 6 lines in a hexagram, each of which is either *yin* or *yang*, creating 2^6 possibilities.
51. *I Ching*, Hexagram 25, *Innocence*, pp. 100–101.
52. My thanks to Betsy Partridge for first sharing this phrase with me.
53. Miki Shima, *The Medical I Ching: Oracle of the Healer Within* (Boulder, Colo.: Blue Poppy Press, 1992).
43. *I Ching*, Hexagram 39, *Obstruction*, p. 152.

CHAPTER 4

Model of the Five Elements

Symbols of Energetic Movement and Their Associations

The sage continues the work of nature
in the human world.¹

—*I Ching*

The model of the Five Elements is one of the unchanging laws that brings order to the myriad manifestations of life, discovered through observing the workings of nature. For the ancient Chinese, the essence of the spiritual path was to live in harmony with the rhythms of the natural world, and the elemental relationships have guided that pursuit over the centuries. Applied throughout Chinese culture, the elements are found in a cuisine that balances five basic flavors, in paintings that incorporate the five associated colors, and in a system of music built on a five-note scale. There was a time in the history of China when these ideas were used to govern, infusing the political process with wisdom. Since the energy within the human being is seen to follow these same principles, an understanding of the Five Elements allows the medical practitioner to diagnose and treat the *ch'i*, which is the goal of Chinese medicine.

五行

Wu Hsing
(Five Elements)

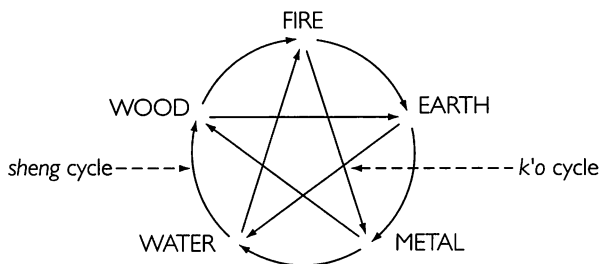


Figure 4. The Creative and Control Cycles

Essentially, the Law of the Five Elements describes a fundamental interrelationship of nature's elements. The circular arrangement, known as the *sheng* or creative-cycle, states simply that Wood creates Fire, Fire creates Earth, Earth creates Metal, Metal creates Water, and Water creates Wood (Figure 4). We can see how Wood creates Fire in the way a log serves as fuel for a flame; Fire, in turn, creates Earth as the ashes fall back to the soil; Earth creates Metal in the minerals found within the earth and in the mountains rising up from the plains; Metal then creates Water as seen in the rivers that run down from the mountains or in the rocks of the stream that hold the water in its place; and finally Water, the source of life that allows the tree to grow, creates Wood. This cycle of the elements is also referred to as the mother-child relationship.

In addition, the Five Element system includes another arrangement, the *k'o* or control-cycle, which is depicted by the arrows on the inside of the diagram. This pattern describes the observation that Wood controls Earth, Earth controls Water, Water controls Fire, Fire controls Metal, and Metal controls Wood. Wood controls the Earth in that trees prevent a hillside from eroding; Earth controls Water as the banks keep a river flowing in its course; Water controls Fire since it can put out a blaze; Fire controls Metal in that Fire can melt Metal; and Metal controls Wood in the way an axe can fell a tree.

Though some Chinese teachings refer to this elemental cycle as destructive, it is more useful to understand the *k'o* cycle as essential for keeping the balance, reflecting the principle of *yin/yang*. Without this controlling aspect, the *sheng* cycle would lead to an unchecked build-up of energies that is likely to become excessive.

These relationships are wonderfully balanced and certainly reflect a sense of wholeness. However, in order to use this model in the way the ancients did to describe the movement of life's energies, we must move beyond a concrete interpretation and think of these images symbolically. Symbols have traditionally been utilized in all cultures to allow people to transcend the limits of rational thought and approach the realm of mystery. Since these laws were derived from nature, especially from an awareness of the changes through the year and the alternations in the plant world, the qualities of the seasons can be used as a metaphor to uncover the true meaning of the elements. Because these patterns are inextricable from life, they are able to reflect the transformations of *ch'i*. Through observing the shifts in the energy through the cycle of the seasons, we move from a static and finite view of the elements to a dynamic model for grasping the infinite.

Wood symbolizes the energy of the springtime, a time of birth and growth. There is an upward movement of energy in nature, and we observe a bursting forth of activity, as for example in the bamboo shoot pushing up through the soil. In *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* this season is described as the period of "beginning and development of life," as living things unfold according to the plan inherent in their seed. To get a sense of what the Wood element means, we need only reflect on the vitality and creative expression that is all around us in this season.

After the growth of spring, there is a transition into the heat of summer, into the Fire element. The rising aspect of nature's cycle

has reached its zenith, as all things come to fullness in the light and warmth of the sun. Everywhere there is “luxurious growth,” and the life energy reaches maturity and finds its expression. To appreciate Fire, we can notice, for example, how we feel on a warm summer day at a picnic with friends. Again, it is through a personal experience of these elements that we can understand the meaning they held for the ancient Chinese.

Next, we move into the season of late summer, which accounts for the total of five seasons in this model. The energy has again shifted and transforms into the time of the Earth element. Here there is a welcome decrease from the intensity of the summer heat, as the light energy begins to wane. Earth represents a time of harvest and “abundance,” as witnessed in the fruits ripening on the vine. This energy is a symbol of nourishment, sustenance, and stability. During the late summer (sometimes referred to as Indian summer), one may feel that all the seasons are present, an impression that is consistent with the placement of Earth at the center in the Yellow River Map of the elements, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Continuing our journey through the seasons, we come to autumn, the time of the Metal element, when the diminishing of the light energy continues. This is a time of letting go, as seen in the leaves falling from the trees. Walking in the woods during this season provides a sense of peace; the active stages of the cycle are now complete, and we can get in touch with the quality of life. The autumn is a time of balance and is called the period of “tranquility of one’s conduct.” In this quiet time, when nature is turning inward, we feel inspiration and a strength of spirit.

Finally, with the coming of winter, we have the Water energy, a time to go down into the depths and return to the source of the life cycle. During this period of “closing and storing,” the reservoirs fill up and the energies are replenished through rest. There is a stark-

ness around us, an impression of “emphasis” in the natural world, as seen in the bare branches of the trees. At this time, the life energy is now underground; with the stillness of winter comes tremendous potential, as the Water element contains the seed for the new birth in the spring.

To deepen our appreciation of the movement of the energy through the seasons, it is helpful to compare the associations of the elements that have just been presented. The chart below summarizes these aspects and adds some others:

ASSOCIATIONS OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS IN NATURE					
	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Season:	Spring	Summer	Late Summer (harvest)	Fall	Winter
Power:	Birth & Growth	Maturity	Decrease	Balance	Emphasis
Period of:	Beginning & Development of Life	Luxurious Growth	Abundance	Tranquility of One's Conduct	Closing & Storing
Climate:	Wind	Heat	Humidity	Dryness	Cold
Direction:	East	South	Center	West	North
Planet:	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
Animals:	Fowl	Sheep	Ox	Horse	Pig
Grains:	Wheat	Glutinous Millet	Millet	Rice	Beans
Number:	8	7	5	9	6

The Law of the Five Elements is so simple that it reminds us of a child's game, but this simplicity is the key to its elegance and power. The ancient Chinese lived close to the soil and had a keen sense of life's rhythms. They uncovered the principles of Five Element energetics in the most natural way, through tending their crops through the seasons. The old farmer knew that if he didn't

plant the seeds in the springtime, he would have missed the moment when the summer arrived. Without the growth of the spring (Wood), and the full maturity of summer (Fire), there would be no harvest (Earth). Similarly, if the farmer failed to pick the crops in the late summer and to turn the soil in the autumn, it would be too late once the frost set in. It is the work of the Earth time that allows for the letting go of autumn (Metal) and the rest of winter (Water). People who live an agrarian lifestyle are in intimate relationship with the seasonal energies, and they have a genuine sense of what it means to be in harmony with them. Because the elements are universal, as we study the Five Element model today we can, like the traditional farmer, draw upon our own connection with nature to build an awareness of the elements. This, in turn, allows us to cultivate true wisdom within. Words can only provide a description for energies that ultimately must be known through life experience.

As we follow the progression through the seasons, we can observe the *sheng* cycle operating in the way that each element creates the next one in the sequence. Since “the end of everything is joined to a new beginning,”² the movement is circular and self-perpetuating, resulting in the endless transformation of life’s energies. The *I Ching* speaks of this rhythm in terms of “the appearance and withdrawal of the vegetative life force.”³ We find an expansion of the light energy (*yang*) through spring and summer and a contraction of the light (or a rising of the dark *yin*) through late summer and autumn, coming to a rest in winter. If we think of these changes as a pattern of rising and falling energy, we have a model based on the number *two*, which provides an understanding in terms of *yin/yang*. If we choose to make *five* divisions in this alternation between light and dark instead of two, we generate the Five Elements.⁴ Each of the elements can thus be understood as stages in the flow of life

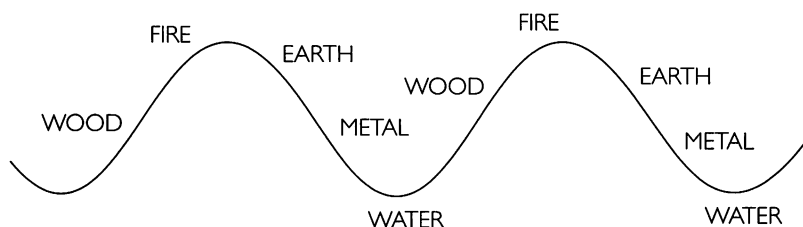


Figure 5. The Identity of the Five Element and *Yin/Yang* Models

from most *yin* to most *yang*, symbols of five aspects in the endless expansion and contraction of the energies over time. This temporal progression of the movement between *yin* and *yang* can be pictured as a continuous sine wave, with the elements created along the way (Figure 5). If the transformations of *yin/yang* give rise to the Five Elements, then these two models are really different ways to describe the same natural process, based respectively on the numbers two and five. At their core they are expressing the same truth.



Since humankind is seen in traditional cultures as an extension of nature, embodying the laws that are observed in the world around, it was an easy step for the sages of antiquity to apply the patterns of the elements to the human condition. Once it is understood that we are a microcosm reflecting the same patterns as the larger macrocosm, each of the elements holds a meaning for our lives. The Five Element model then became the basis for a system of medicine. Assessing the elements in a person could be a rather abstract, intellectual endeavor, if not for the fact that there evolved a practical way to read these energies through the senses. Since *ch'i* cannot be perceived directly, it is through the associations for each of the elements that we come to know the state of the energy. In

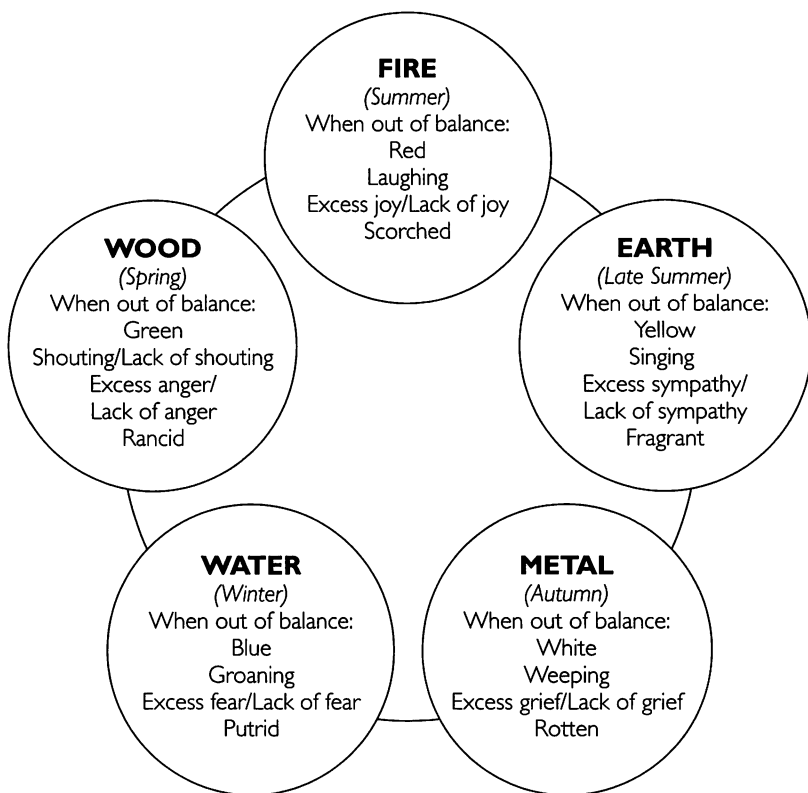


Figure 6. Color, Sound, Emotion, and Odor

particular, through observing the color, sound, emotion, and odor in a living human being, practitioners of Five Element acupuncture can bring this ancient system alive in the present moment. The above diagram of the elements indicates these correspondences (Figure 6).

Wood is the energy of the springtime, a symbol of growth and development. To understand what the Wood element means in a human life, we can examine a person's ability to grow. Does her life contain new births and creativity in much the same way as this energy exists in nature? Is there a plan, a vision of where she is

headed? Can she make the decisions that allow growth to take place? The goal in Chinese medicine is a balance in the energies, and the healthy expression of Wood is probably best considered to be assertiveness, like the upward-expanding bamboo shoot that pushes up through a crack in the pavement. When this activity goes to the extreme, or when growth does not occur in a person's life, the tension and frustration may be reflected in a shouting voice and the emotion of anger, expressions that can be understood as diagnostic of a Wood element out of balance. The ideal of health in this system is seen to be the ability to express a range of emotions in the course of the day. This can be observed, for example, in the play of children, who are capable of getting fiercely angry, but then move on to other feelings in a relatively short time. In working with the Five Elements, when we find someone who is stuck in this emotion and is still angry long after an event is over, we suspect that she may have difficulty in the issues pertaining to Wood.

Conversely, an imbalance in this element may be associated with a lack of shouting and a lack of anger, as in the individual who is unable to assert herself to make things happen. Someone who is incapable of getting angry, who has her foot stepped on and says, "Pardon me for putting my foot under yours," could also be suffering from a Wood imbalance. It is likely this same person will not have the creative energy required to make changes in other areas of life, and as a result will most likely not be able to manifest growth. Thus, we find that each of the elements may be out of balance in either an excessive or deficient way (bipolar dysfunctions that reflect the principle of *yin* and *yang*).

Through observing the world in the springtime, we know that Wood is associated with the color green. When this element does not find a healthy expression in an individual, we can actually observe a green hue on the side of her face. The phrase in our language "green

with envy” indicates an awareness of this phenomenon. If a person has an imbalance in Wood, we may also smell a rancid odor, like the smell of a gym locker room or rancid oils. It is important to understand these associations in their proper context as natural expressions of their respective elements. The value of these correspondences lies in the way they reveal the energy of the moment: a person may deny being angry in words, but if she expresses herself in a shouting voice, her true feelings are unmasked.

The Fire element is the energy of the summer, and in evaluating a person’s Fire we want to know if there is warmth in his life; quite literally we can ask, Does he have sunshine? The realm of interpersonal relationships is in many ways the province of Fire, and we can see the health of this element reflected in the ability to communicate, make connections, and develop true intimacy. On the deepest level, Fire energy comes to us through love and it is here, in God’s greatest gift, that we experience the spiritual power of this element. An imbalance may be observed in a red color, inappropriate laughter in the voice, and excessive joy (or in a lack of these qualities). The odor of Fire is scorched, like the smell of a hot iron left too long on clothes, or of a child with a high fever. These associations can be derived quite easily from an awareness of our sensory impressions on a summer’s day.

We probably have all encountered people who are deficient in Fire, who seem cold and distant and lack the spark that is the essence of life itself. An absence in the warmth this element provides can be observed, in a very real way, through lack of laughing in the voice, lack of joy in the emotion, and a color that can be described as lack of red. These people may crave connection, only to find that others avoid them once it becomes clear that those lacking in Fire are only interested in taking that element and are incapable of giving it back, in turn. Then there are those who are always

laughing and socializing, who never seem happy unless they are partying. Might the compulsion to constantly seek joy on the outside be an indication that these people lack a genuinely sustained Fire on the inside? As we look beneath the surface we may indeed find that the seemingly excessive joy of the person addicted to parties is actually compensating for a deficiency within.

The ancient Chinese understanding is that any extreme in the associations is an expression of an elemental disharmony, and often there may be a mixture of excessive and deficient expressions. When the Fire element is out of balance it is actually quite common to observe an individual move suddenly from excess joy to a total lack of joy (say, for example, when he experiences rejection in a relationship). According to the principle that *yin* and *yang* mutually create each other, extremes turn into their opposite, as they prove to be “two sides of the same coin.”

The Earth energy brings stability and a sense of groundedness to the human condition. If a person is struggling in this element, she can experience tremendous insecurity. It is as if she literally has no connection to the earth. Since the late summer is the time of harvest, we can ask, in assessing an individual's Earth, whether she feels nurtured, can nurture others, and is capable of bringing forth a harvest in her life. A yellow color (like hay ready for the reaper) may be observed along the side of the face when there is an imbalance here. The sound of singing and the emotion of sympathy remind us of a mother caring for her child (Earth is indeed the great Mother). Again, an excess in these signs may reflect a disharmony—for example, a person who is inclined to mother everyone. Someone who is always feeling sorry for herself, who is constantly seeking sympathy, may also be expressing this same pattern; and, of course, a lack of sympathy may be observed in someone who is out of touch with this element. The odor is fragrant, like the earth in late summer, and it

is an interesting correlation that people with uncontrolled diabetes (a disease of the pancreas, which is an organ associated with the Earth element) have a fruity smell of ketones on the breath that is indeed fragrant.

CASE HISTORY: I once treated an older woman who lived in a mobile home park. Having a long history of taking care of others, and happening to own a car, she took on the task of running errands for other residents who lacked transportation. She found herself unable to set limits and would ignore her own needs in order to try to please everyone else. In time, she developed gastritis and was put on the medicine Prilosec to reduce stomach acid. Since the stomach organ is involved with bringing in food, problems here may be a manifestation of an imbalance in the Earth element. From a Five Element perspective, her over involvement in which she attempted to fix every situation (based on excess sympathy) was at the root of her dis-ease. The goal of treatment, through both counseling and acupuncture, was to restore a healthier balance to this emotion. A wholistic approach, in this case, allowed a deeper level to be addressed and provided far more lasting results than did symptomatic treatment. Eventually, she was able to discontinue the medication.

The Metal energy of autumn represents a time to find meaning and spirit. For humans, this element connects us to a greater purpose, imbuing life with a sense of quality, rather than quantity. Metal is required for self-esteem and, in extreme cases, if a person is cut off from this element, there can be the most profound depression and despair. When out of balance, we can observe the white color (like a metallic sheen), a weeping voice, the emotion of grief, and a rotten odor (which reminds us of the smell of a decaying pumpkin in the autumn). These were the diagnostic clues in the

first Five Element patient I ever observed, as described in the “Introduction.”

It is not surprising that our modern world, having lost contact with traditions and meaningful rituals, suffers from a lack of spirit. Though the essence of Metal has little to do with material possessions, people typically attempt to compensate for a deficiency through acquiring money and jewels (physical manifestations of this element). Those who endlessly search for spiritual truths, who repeatedly travel across the globe to be with a guru, may be seeking on the outside what they are missing (and can in the end only find) on the inside. One of the healthiest expressions of the Metal element I’ve come across was the statement by an impoverished but very spiritual Hispanic woman who, when asked whether her life had meaning, replied simply, “God does not make junk.”

Water, the energy of winter, symbolizes a time of stillness and rest that allows for the building up of reserves. When the reservoirs are dry there can be no potential for coming forth into life, and those with a deficiency in this element may experience a severe depletion of energy. Since the winter rains bring fluidity and freshness, Water brings the ability to flow; when there is a lack of this energy, a person may become rigid. An imbalance in this element may be reflected in a blue color, which can appear under the eyes or as a darkening on the side of the face that makes it seem that the person needs a shave. A groaning sound in the voice and the emotion of fear are also associated with the Water element, which is understandable when one considers the fear of drowning or the feeling that would be engendered by a scarcity in the storehouse during the wintertime. Once again, the ideal is to achieve balance, and we need to realize there is appropriate fear that prevents a person from being unduly reckless. Thus, the daredevil who is constantly risking his life may also be expressing an imbalance in Water. The odor for

this element is putrid, the smell of stagnant water or of urinals. I have found the best place to experience this smell to be hospital wards, where the overwhelming putrid odor stems from the combination of bed pans plus the devastating fear that is typically present.

CASE HISTORY: I recall the case of a carpenter who, despite extensive bodywork therapy, suffered from chronic back pain. Of interest was the fact that his symptoms were especially severe in the winter months. His fear at not being able to earn a living was quite apparent and, since the meridians of the Water element run through the back, the pattern underlying his situation could be readily understood through the Five Element model. He failed to respond to treatments on the physical level essentially because the problem did not have a structural cause. Rather, it was an energetic disturbance of depleted reserves and held the underlying message that he needed to rest during the wintertime. Like so many in the modern world, he ignored the signals from his body as he was swept into a frenzy of activity during the Christmas season—behavior that was clearly not in harmony with nature. The advice found in the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine for staying healthy in the winter would apply here: go to bed early and rise late, after the sun is well up in the sky. Once he integrated this counsel into his life, the back pain began to subside.



Though there are a great many expressions in human life, it is the color, sound, emotion, and odor, along with the twelve pulses, that are primarily used to assess the state of the elements in Five Element acupuncture. As they come closest to reflecting the true

energy of the individual, these associations form the foundation for diagnosis in a system of medicine concerned with addressing the *ch'i*. Each of us needs to express all of the elements in our lives and, in a similar way, we tend to manifest a spectrum of colors, sounds, emotions, and odors in the course of a day. In order to discover the element that is most out of balance, the key is to recognize the correspondences that stand out as being inappropriate, whether excessive or strikingly absent. If a person fails to show any sorrow one week after the death of a parent, we would call that an inappropriate lack of grief. On the other hand, if years later the individual is still immobilized by the loss, that may represent an excess grief. Both situations point to an imbalance in the Metal element.

On the following page is an extended list of the Five Element associations. It is traditional for students of this system to inquire into a range of manifestations as a way to evaluate the state of the *ch'i*. As we continue our exploration of the elements, we will have the opportunity to examine these relationships in greater depth.

The universal applicability of the Five Element model can be appreciated in the way it can be applied to anatomy and physiology, as understood by modern biology. The vital organs fall nicely into a Five Element pattern, indicative of a plan for the organization of the body that is entirely consistent with traditional wisdom (Figure 7).⁵ On the level of cellular physiology, metabolism can be categorized according to the Five Elements, as the basic food groups and life-sustaining molecules also follow this framework.⁶ Fats can be associated with Wood, since they are digested with the aid of the gall bladder and are processed by the liver. Proteins, the spark of life, may be related to the Fire element. Carbohydrates are considered to be an expression of Earth, as they provide the sweet taste, while the pancreas produces the insulin needed for sugar to enter the cells. Both

ASSOCIATIONS OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS IN PEOPLE

	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Color:	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Blue
Sound:	Shouting	Laughing	Singing	Weeping	Groaning
Emotion:	Anger	Joy/Lack of Joy	Sympathy, Worry	Grief	Fear
Odor:	Rancid	Scorched	Fragrant	Rotten	Putrid
ORGANS/OFFICIALS:					
Yang	Gall Bladder	Three Heater, Sm. Intestine	Stomach	Colon	Bladder
Yin	Liver	Heart Protector, Heart	Spleen & Pancreas	Lungs	Kidneys
Metabolites:	Fats	Proteins	Carbohydrates	Minerals, Oxygen	Water
Sense Organ:	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth	Nose	Ears
Orifice:	Eyes	Ears	Mouth	Nose	Lower Orifices
Fortifies:	Ligaments	Pulse	Flesh (muscles)	Skin	Bones (joints)
External Manifestation:	Nails	Complexion	Lips	Body hair	Head hair
Flavor:	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent	Salty
Fluid Secretions:	Tears	Perspiration	Saliva	Mucous	Urine
Spiritual Resource:	Spiritual Soul (<i>Hun</i>)	Heavenly Spirit (<i>Shen</i>)	Thought (<i>Yi</i>)	Animal Spirit (<i>P'o</i>)	Will (<i>Chih</i>)
Positive Aspect:	Bursting forth	Love	Thoughtfulness	Spirituality	Courage
Task:	Creativity	Compassion	Caring	Meaning & inspiration	Inner strength
Resolution For Emotional Imbalance:	Forgiveness, Letting go	Stillness, Surrender	Boundaries, Service	Relationship, Connection	Containment, Faith

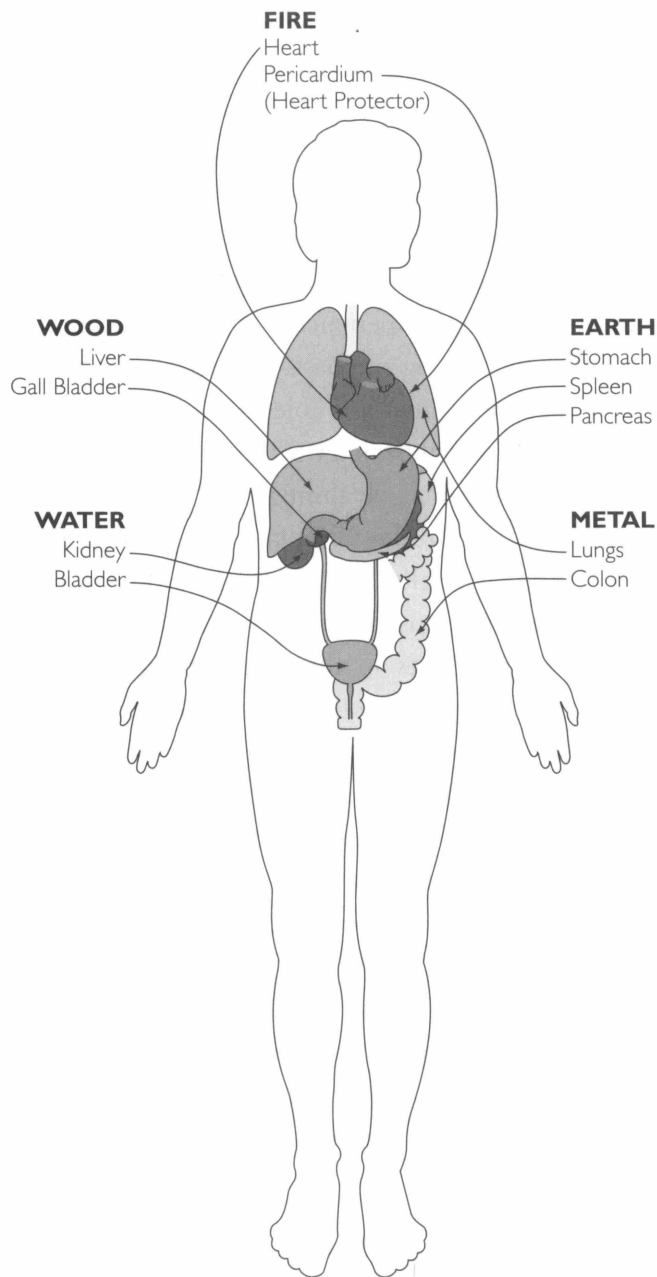


Figure 7. A Lay-out of the Organs of the Body According to the Five Element Map

the minerals needed for healthy function, as well as the oxygen required for respiration, correspond to Metal. Lastly, water, which comprises two-thirds of our bodies, belongs with the Water element.

Historically rooted in ancient China, the practical use of the Law of the Five Elements based on observable associations is, to a great extent, the work of Professor J. R. Worsley, with whom I had the good fortune to study in England. Drawing upon diverse healing methods, as well as his own experience in Asia, he revitalized classical practices, placing a strong emphasis on sensory perception. The genius of this approach is that it is able to cut through words and symptoms in order to read the energy of the moment. As a system of medicine, it is transmitted largely through oral teaching and, when asked for a textbook, Dr. Worsley never failed to remind his students that nature is the real teacher of the elements. Practitioners are encouraged to develop themselves as instruments in order to effectively apply these principles in the treatment room, and non-acupuncturists can certainly use these same tools to assess energy and act in harmony with the demands of the time.

It is said that “the map is not the territory,” and it is indeed important to not become so focused on the methodology that we forget the real person who is the reason for the inquiry. Yet, to address the full range of life’s expressions, we need a vehicle capable of expressing a deep level of experience. Based on enduring patterns of nature, the Five Element model is a form that encapsulates a greater wisdom. Since it is built on images that are inherently part of the human condition, it has survived the test of time and remains as applicable today as it was in China, thousands of years ago.

NOTES

1. *I Ching*, Bollingen Series, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), Hexagram 30, *The Clinging*, p. 119.

2. *I Ching*, “Discussion of the Trigrams,” p. 271.
3. *I Ching*, “The Great Treatise,” p. 294.
4. For those who prefer fewer categories, the “lumpers” among us, the *yin/yang* model offers a way to describe the movement of life energy with just *two* distinctions. The “splitters,” who enjoy breaking things down further, would naturally gravitate to a system based on *five* (or more) possibilities.
5. Susan Mankowski first brought this East-West connection to my awareness, during conversations we had while working together at Jade Mountain Health Centre.
6. I am indebted to Darlena L’Orange, fellow Taoist and co-author, for pointing out this relationship to me. For a more in-depth exploration of metabolism and nutrition in a format consistent with Five Element theory, please see the book we have written together: *Ancient Roots, Many Branches: Energetics of Healing across Cultures and through Time* (Twin Lakes, Wisc.: Lotus Press, 2002).

CHAPTER 5

The Circle of Energies

Life's Fundamental Patterns

What pattern connects the crab to the lobster
and the orchid to the primrose
and all four of them to me?
And me to you?¹
—Gregory Bateson

The gift of Chinese medicine lies in the way in which it allows us to penetrate behind the veil of presenting symptoms and uncover a deeper understanding of the human condition. Though we will, in this chapter, discuss the typical diseases that arise when each of the elements is out of balance, it is important to consider these manifestations in the context of the whole person. The Five Element method can be thought of as a system of *energy medicine*, and treatment is directed to the underlying energetic pattern as read through the color, sound, emotion, and odor. This wholistic approach to healing is in contradistinction to “cookbook acupuncture,” in which any particular illness would automatically be assigned the same selection of points, without regard to the uniqueness of the individual involved. In my opinion, this symptomatic style has little to offer Western culture, where an elaborate medical structure for pigeonholing complaints is already in place. The power of the Five Elements, specifically, stems from its reliance on images from nature that transcend cultural boundaries, bringing us to an archetypal level of experience. Throughout

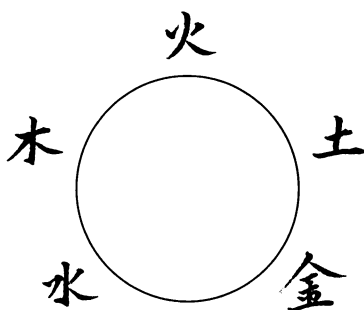


Figure 8. The Elements Depicted in Chinese Characters

our exploration of this model, the fundamental tool remains the use of symbols (Figure 8).

WOOD: THE EXPANSION OF SPRINGTIME

He not busy being born, is a busy dying.²

—Bob Dylan



Wood

The Wood element is symbolized by the tree, rooted in the ground and reaching up toward the sky. As the tree stands tall between these two poles, we recognize an organization based on the number *three* and are reminded of the model of Heaven-Earth-Man. Wood is an image of birth, growth, and unfolding according to the plan contained in the seed. It stands for all plants and animals that grow and bring forth life. As Jung says in his “Seven Sermons to the Dead,” “The growing one is the *Tree of Life*; it is three, for it filleth space with bodily forms.”³

In examining the meaning Wood energy holds, it is evident that every tree is unique and follows its own destiny. The oak tree, for

example, is the manifestation of the possibility prefigured in the acorn. There is a valuable lesson for health care practitioners in this image, as we are reminded that “You can’t make a pine tree into an oak tree.”⁴ Thus, if a tree is leaning, we may need to accept that it is ordained to be this way. In working with clients, we must also respect their individuality, encouraging them to unfold according to their own inner law. Ever mindful not to impose our own values, the goal is to help everyone become the best tree that they can be.

In observing nature, we can appreciate that a tree needs to maintain flexibility and be able to yield in the wind. The tree that becomes rigid and hollow, unable to bend, is the one that gets blown over in the storm. Especially true when young, even in the case of the mature tree, the branches need to retain this characteristic. This, then, provides insight into the process of growth, showing us that all living things need to be adaptable and change with the times. And yet, throughout its life, the tree stays true to its inherent potential, thereby striking a balance between an inner directive and outer environmental forces as it struggles to carve out a place in the world.

Another aspect of balance reflected in this image is the fact that the tree cannot only grow toward the light but, to be strong, must also sink its roots deep into the dark earth. A tree that only reaches heavenward will not survive the windstorm. When we apply this teaching to the human experience, we realize that we must also be willing to enter into the shadow side and accept life’s difficulties to be resilient. As the playwright Thornton Wilder has asked, “Without your wounds, where would your power be?” Kahlil Gibran, in his noted work *The Prophet*, invokes this same theme when he reminds us, “The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.”⁵ The symbol of the tree is a call to wholeness, encouraging us to embrace the darkness as well as the light.

The *I Ching*, as we have seen, provides some illuminating words of wisdom based on the processes of nature. The hexagram for *Development (Gradual Progress)*, ䷗, has particular relevance here. It is composed of the trigrams *Sun*, the Gentle (wind and wood), above, and *Ken*, Keeping Still (mountain), below. (Please refer to the chart on page 57.) This image juxtaposes the tree, continually striving upward, with the eternal mountain, the picture of stillness. From the vantage point of the Five Element model, the trigrams reflect the Wood element supported by Water. The universal archetype of the hexagram reveals the underlying pattern:

A tree on a mountain develops slowly, according to the law of its being and consequently stands firmly rooted. . . . The tree is visible from afar, and its development influences the landscape of the entire region. It does not shoot up like a swamp plant; its growth proceeds gradually. Thus also the work of influencing people can be only gradual. No sudden influence or awakening is of lasting effect.⁶

The hexagram emphasizes an idea, fundamental to Wood energy, that development must be based on an inner plan. The attributes of the trigrams teach us the qualities necessary for “gradual progress”: “Within is tranquility, which guards against precipitate actions, and without is penetration, which makes development and progress possible.”⁷

Observation of the seasons enhances our understanding of the stages in the cycle of *ch'i*. Wood, the energy of the springtime, stands for new beginnings and growth. This is a rising, expansive movement that holds a sense of fervor; nature is literally teeming with activity. Again, it is our own impressions of the natural world that help us grasp the meaning of the elements:

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,

And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.⁸

What does all this mean in the human realm? The essential issue, symbolized by the Wood element, is, of course, growth. In assessing a person, we want to examine whether, like the tree, his growth reflects an inner truth, has the power to assert itself, is in tune with the ever-changing demands of the time, and is well rooted and stable. Other positive qualities attributed to Wood include birth, creativity, vision, and defense of one's boundaries. The seasonal rhythm provides a metaphor for how the *sheng* cycle (the mother-child relationship of the elements) unfolds in life. For an individual to experience the maturation of summer (Fire) that leads to a harvest in the late summer (Earth), the seeds need to be planted in the springtime. The creative act that initiates this process is governed by Wood. Likewise, to have the possibility for satisfying relationships (an expression of Fire), the assertiveness and limit setting of Wood is needed. It is common to see relationships fail when this element is out of balance, as for example when one partner is either stuck in anger or unable to express this emotion when it is called for.

Similarly, it is nature that teaches us of the *k'o* cycle interactions. Just as trees prevent the hillside from eroding, Wood is able to control the Earth element. The power of the Five Elements as a

guide for staying healthy, however, lies in the way insights from the natural world can be extrapolated to the human situation. Remember the older woman, described in the previous chapter, whose excessive sympathy led her to care for everyone in the mobile home park at her own expense? It was only when she got in touch with some appropriate anger, as reflected in the phrase, “I have a life too!”, that she was able to set reasonable boundaries and find a way to say, “No.” It was the Wood element that allowed healing to take place by restoring balance to her overly-involved Earth.

As we look further down the Associations chart (found on page 80), we find that there are two organs or *officials* in each of the elements, except for the Fire element, which has four. This correspondence allows us to relate the vital organs in health and disease, as well as specific functions, to each element. It also permits us to perform acupuncture treatments on the meridians that are included in this energy. The term *official* is derived from a Confucian model that compares the workings of the organism to the ministers of the empire. In chapter 8, we will examine these relationships in greater depth. Our goal throughout is to recognize why these entities belong in their respective elements. For instance, residing within the Wood element are the Liver and Gall Bladder officials. In Chinese medicine, the Liver is the planner, holding a vision for how any process can unfold. The Gall Bladder is considered to be the decision-maker that initiates action. It is apparent that both of these functions are necessary to make growth possible—logical reflections of the energy in which they are found.

Imbalances in the elements may manifest on all three levels of experience, *body/mind/spirit*. As might be surmised from appreciating the strength of a tree, the body’s structure is governed to a great degree by the Wood element, which fortifies the ligaments and tendons. Since the Gall Bladder meridian traverses the length of the

body, headaches, symptoms along the side of the leg (sciatica), and arthritis in the shoulder, hip, or ankle, all may be physical expressions of a disturbance in this energy. The Liver official, associated with the function of planning, is related in the Five Element model to the immune system, our internal plan for defending the body from foreign invaders. An immune deficiency, in which a person has extreme susceptibility to infection, may reflect a lack of energy here, while allergies and autoimmune disorders may be the result of over-activity.

On the mental level, the Gall Bladder is involved with decisions and judgments. Someone who is unable to make a decision, as reflected in the comment, “I used to be indecisive, now I’m not sure,” may be manifesting a problem in this official, as is the person who is constantly making decisions for everyone. A Liver imbalance may result in a lack of focus or direction or, conversely, in being overly planned and structured. On the spirit level, the Wood element provides vision and hope for the future, always holding the possibility for new beginnings. It is understandable why these meridians are often treated for depression, and it is no accident that the last point on the Liver pathway (Liver 14) is called *the Gate of Hope*. Chinese medical theory describes different aspects of the human soul. The *hun*, translated as the spiritual-soul, is involved with the upward movement toward heaven and is the spiritual resource that corresponds to the Wood element.

CASE HISTORY: As these examples illustrate, we find that, true to *yin* and *yang*, the Wood element can be out of balance in either an excessive or deficient way. For instance, I treated a businesswoman in my practice who came in for migraine headaches. In conversing with her, it quickly became apparent that she was a perfectionist, full of judgments toward herself and others. She reported that it was

typical for her to be up in the middle of the night, consumed with plans and decisions, her mind working constantly. Her condition could be diagnosed as excessive Wood energy. The headache, as is characteristic of migraines, was found along the Gall Bladder meridian, whose function happens to involve decision-making. Once again we can see how the Five Element system is able to explain a wide range of symptomatology as an expression of an energetic imbalance. To restore harmony, the goal of acupuncture treatment was to quiet and sedate her Wood energy.

In contrast, an indecisive, unassertive woman who spoke in a subdued voice (lack of shout) and tried to accommodate everyone also presented with migraine headaches. Though she seemed perpetually cheerful on the outside, her inability to express her true feelings left her angry and resentful on the inside. This pattern reflected a deficiency in Wood, and treatment was directed at building and tonifying this energy.

Chinese medicine offers a unified way to address the presenting disharmony that is inevitably expressed throughout the human being, without the separation inherent in Western thinking. In fact, the language itself is all inclusive, and the character for the Liver official conveys the notion of a function that is operating on every level. The fact that the Liver is related to the sense organ of the eyes in the physical body, as well as the ability to see what needs to be done with the mind and the capacity for vision on the spirit level, derives from its role as the official of planning. From observing the tree in nature, we learn of the role of the Wood element in human life—in essence, to allow the “inner law of our being” to grow in the world:

Be like a tree in pursuit of your cause.
Stand firm, grip hard, thrust upward,
bend to the winds of heaven,
—and learn tranquility.⁹

FIRE: “YOU HAVE THE ENERGY OF THE SUN IN YOU”¹⁰

A hand moves,
and the fire’s whirling takes different shapes:
All things change when we do.
The first word, “Ah,”
blossoms into all others. Each of them is true.¹¹

—*Kukai, 9th century Zen Monk*

Fire is warmth and light and movement. It is the brilliance of a raging flame rising to the heavens and the soft glow of a summer sunset. This element conveys the joy of being alive, the excitement of participating in the splendor of the world. Fire is connection to another human being, a symbol of the love that, once kindled within, can burn brightly and radiate out to others. The poet Rumi invites us to enter fully into the dance of life, and burn it all up:



Come to the orchard in Spring.
There is light and wine, and sweethearts in the pomegranate flowers.
If you do not come, these do not matter.
If you do come, these do not matter.¹²

In the warmth of a summer day, when the sun is high overhead providing heat and light, we experience the Fire element. The energy is expansive and everything is seen with great clarity. In the life of the plant this is the time of maturity, as all of the previously hidden potential manifests in the world. Fire kindles an enthusiasm for life that is truly contagious. The challenge is to open up to this joy:

Thus for years that you no longer counted, holy, you played
with infinite joy, as though it were not inside you,
but lay, belonging to no one, all around
on the gentle lawns of the earth, where the godlike children
had left it.¹³

Fire is a life principle. Whether we consider the cellular level, where metabolism is essentially a slow burning biochemical fire, or the level of the organism, this element represents the essence of what it means to be alive. Our language captures the meaning this energy holds in phrases such as: “I’m all fired up,” “the spark of life,” “the fire is going out,” “she erupted like a volcano,” or “he’s burnt out.” In mythology, the ability to create fire is a central theme in the emergence of culture; the story of Prometheus stealing the secret of fire from the gods conveys this message. At the time of the winter solstice, when the sun is farthest away and the day the shortest, people around the world perform rituals to bring in the Fire element. Lighting the candles for Chanukah, enjoying Christmas lights, drinking warming beverages (including the “fire-water,” alcohol), or gathering around the hearth with friends—all are expressions of this universal need for warmth and light. Throughout the history of humankind, the symbol of Fire has always been synonymous with life.

Applied to the human condition, Fire represents joy, love, connection, relationships, and the full expression of all that is within. It can be said that the wealth of a person is measured not so much by material possessions as by the amount of love that surrounds her. From the observation of patients, however, it seems that “With the fast pace and complexities of our modern technological world, sadly, Fire seems to be going out in the world today.”¹⁴ The isolation, loss of community, and lack of time for simple pleasures that many of us feel are all symptoms of this cultural elemental imbalance. Surfing the Internet is just no substitute for a genuine connection with a real human being. The urgency with which people seek intimate relationship speaks to the desperation for Fire that is so rampant around us. Despite endless media entertainment, when a person is cut off from this element, life hardly seems worth living. Indeed, without the sun there would be no life at all.

It is in the expression of love that most people come to know Fire. In Chinese medicine, communication and speech are governed by this element (the tongue is the associated sense organ), and sexuality, where the two become one, is the ultimate culmination of this energy. The basic message of the Beatles' song, *All You Need is Love*, touches a deep longing. In general, our music is filled with a yearning for true intimacy. From the Platter's *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*, to the Doors' *Light My Fire*, to Bruce Springsteen's *I'm on Fire*, our songs rely heavily on fire imagery and are driven by this preoccupation in our culture. The Beatles kindly provide us with the basic law of relationships when they sing, "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make."¹⁵

Rumi is in many ways the supreme poet of Fire:

If all you know about fire is what you have heard
see if the fire will agree to cook you!
Certain energies come only when you burn.
If you long for belief, sit down in the fire!¹⁶

Born in the Mid-East in the thirteenth century, Jelaluddin Rumi lived the first part of his life as a scholar and theologian, studying religion in a rather theoretical way. At the age of 37, he met a wandering mystic named Shams, who managed to catalyze his abstract knowledge into passionate expression. As the story goes, Rumi, who was rather fond of his books, took his favorites along on a picnic with his friend. Shams ruthlessly threw them into a pond, stating simply, "Now you must live the truth." Rumi was transformed.

From that moment on, he became a poet, creating some of the most beautiful love poems ever written:

The minute I heard my first love story
I started looking for you, not knowing
how blind that was.
Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.
They're in each other all along.¹⁷

In the ecstatic feelings he held for Shams, Rumi found a path to God. He discovered what it meant to truly connect to another and be consumed by love. What previously had been only theory now had become direct experience:

When I am with you, we stay up all night.
When you're not here, I can't go to sleep.
Praise God for these two insomnias!
And the difference between them.¹⁸

Eventually, Shams was either driven away or murdered by those jealous of their relationship. Rumi was devastated; he never knew that so much pain could exist in the world. He withdrew within himself and, to deal with the intense suffering, would turn in circles for hours on end. In time, he emerged from his grief with the gift of spontaneous poetry. Poems would rise up, without forethought, and Rumi would speak them extemporaneously in Persian, in perfect meter and verse. They flowed out in endless progression; his students simply wrote them down. The power of his language allows single phrases, such as “the soul is here for its own joy,”¹⁹ to become mantras for uniting with the One. Rumi's method of circular dancing became the spiritual practice of a mystical Sufi sect still active today, the Whirling Dervishes. During the remainder of his life, he produced vast volumes of what is generally considered to be among the world's foremost spiritual poetry:

Learn from your great-grandfather Adam!
When he lost the union, the tears that fell from his face
 made every valley in Ceylon full of fragrant spices and herbs.
And you still say you cannot choose the road?
The stubborn angel said that.
And he was the one who refused praise to the inner man.
When a human being has experienced the ecstasy, he knows.

He doesn't say, "Please lay out your system of proofs for me."
From the outer layers of the unconscious, logic;
from the inner man, love.²⁰

Through his pain, Rumi learned that love need not be limited to a private concern with a single individual, but has the potential to bring us to a connection with all people and into the joy of being alive. Relationship became a spiritual path in which the goal was, essentially, to find love everywhere. Rumi came to hold union with the Beloved as an inner experience and, in his verses, it became a metaphor for union with the Divine. His poems carry a burning desire to know that fulfillment and to realize that "there are no edges to this garden":

Look at her face.
Open your eyes into her eyes.
When she laughs, everyone falls in love.
Lift your head up off the table. See,
there are no edges to this garden.
Sweet fruits, every kind you can think of,
branches green and always slightly moving.²¹

Returning to Chinese medicine, an understanding of the four officials within Fire provides insight into the functions of this element in the *body/mind/spirit*. The fact that all of the other elements have only two officials indicates the importance of Fire energy for life. It is here we find the Heart, the Emperor; this is the center of our being, the source of calmness and order. The minister of the Small Intestine allows sorting the pure from the impure, a function that is an embodiment of the clarity and transforming aspect of Fire. The Three Heater, the only official without a corresponding physical organ, resides in this element and is responsible for the proper

distribution of warmth both within and without. And we have the Heart Protector (known as the Pericardium in TCM), crucial for healthy relationships, which creates the protective boundary that permits the Heart to function from openness and compassion.

Since Fire is a symbol of sunshine, one of the obvious manifestations of a deficiency in this element is coldness. This may manifest on the physical level with poor circulation, an inability to get warm, freezing cold extremities (especially if the Three Heater fails to distribute heat properly), sexual difficulties such as frigidity and impotence, and low blood pressure. One of the tools available to acupuncturists for treating a lack of Fire is moxibustion. This is a technique, used more often in the cold of winter, which involves burning Chinese mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) on a needle or on an acupuncture point in order to bring a warming influence directly into the meridian system. Conversely, an overactive Fire element may be expressed on the physical level in the symptoms of hot flashes, fever, rapid heart rate, arrhythmias, and hypertension. Inflammations of all kind indicate an excess of this element in the body, and problems with toxins (such as acne) can be a reflection of a failure of the Small Intestine to separate out impurities.

On the emotional level, a deficiency in Fire may show up as an absence of warmth in relationships, failure to make genuine connections, and a general lack of joy. When people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, experiencing depression from being deprived of the light of the sun, it may indicate that they lack a constant source of Fire within. It is also common for those with an imbalance in this element to be extremely vulnerable and sensitive in relationships. Though they may long for intimate connection, their inability to protect themselves (stemming from a dysfunctional Heart Protector) may lead to avoiding contact altogether. The Small

Intestine brings clear thinking to the mental level through determining what is to be held on to and what is to be eliminated. Without this function there can be deep confusion, as a person seems to be mentally polluted. In addition, we may observe symptoms such as panic and anxiety arise from the lack of a calm Heart official. On the deepest level, a spiritual imbalance in Fire may lead to terrible isolation in which a person is simply unable to give or receive love at all. The *shen*, the spirit from heaven, which connects us to the universal source of Fire, is said to be stored in the Heart.

CASE HISTORY: A story from my practice illustrates the effectiveness of a simple elemental approach to healing. A thirty-year-old Costa Rican woman came to me for acupuncture treatment of abdominal pain that had persisted for two years. All of her tests, including x-rays, ultrasound, and laparoscopy, were negative. Of significance was the complaint of freezing cold hands and feet that had developed along with the pains. Here was a symptom that made no sense to her Western doctor but held the key to a more in-depth understanding of the problem. The history revealed that the woman had grown up in a small village in Costa Rica and, prior to the onset of symptoms, had married an American carpenter and moved to the United States. Now, instead of being surrounded by a community of close friends and relatives where she enjoyed real intimacy, she suddenly found herself isolated in an apartment while her husband worked long hours, in a country where she did not even speak the language. Despite improvement in her physical comfort, the Fire, in essence, had gone out in her life. Cut off from the external source of this element in the warmth of a traditional lifestyle, the woman's internal Fire had become depleted as well. According to the Five Element model, her cold hands and feet were an indicator on the body level of what

was also manifesting on the emotional level in her lack of joy and on the spirit level as a loss of enthusiasm for life itself.

After our first treatment, which included moxibustion on the Three Heater meridian, she reported that her hands and feet were warm for the first time since moving from Costa Rica. I knew we were on course and, after five more treatments, the abdominal pain subsided, though a needle was never placed in the vicinity of her symptom. More importantly, the woman began to regain her old joy and was laughing once again. Back in the stream of life, she was able to sort out her choices in a way that supported her own natural Fire. She began to seek friends and, over time, it became clear that she needed to return to her homeland. Interestingly, her only hesitation came from the assumption that receiving ongoing acupuncture was necessary for her to remain free of pain. I had to encourage her that following her truth was the best way to take care of herself and stay well. These energies, once healthy, are part of our inheritance as human beings and are certainly not dependent on any system of medicine. Her husband elected to join her in Costa Rica, and the story had a happy ending.

As was true for this woman, the teaching from the Fire element is that we need to express all that is within, so that our light can shine in the world. From this viewpoint, the purpose of life is life itself. Along with Rumi, we must be willing to “enter the center of the fire”:²²

*You have the energy of the sun in you,
but you keep knotting it up at the base of your spine. . . .
You’ve gotten drunk on so many kinds of wine.
Taste this. It won’t make you wild.
It’s fire. Give up,
if you don’t understand by this time
that your living is firewood.*²³

EARTH: THE SOURCE OF NOURISHMENT

Teach your children what we have taught our children—
that the Earth is our Mother.

Whatever befalls the earth
befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. . . .

This we know.

The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth.

We did not weave the web of life;

We are merely a strand in it.

Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.²⁴

—Chief Seattle

The ancient Chinese had a deep reverence for Mother Earth, understanding that she is the provider of nourishment, the very source of life. As an agrarian society, they held their connection to the land as sacred and would never think of ravaging her. The old farmer respected the individuality of the soil and could tell, just by feeling it, which crop would grow best in that location. Despite the abuses of the modern age, we can also recognize the qualities of forgiveness and mercy inherent in this element; though we build skyscrapers on her body, the Earth continues to support her children.



From antiquity the Chinese developed a highly intricate system of geomancy, called *Feng Shui*, for living in harmony with the environment. Based primarily on the trigrams of the *I Ching*, and on the other numerical models we have been exploring, practitioners of this art would assess the energy of their surroundings. They could then advise how to align buildings and interior designs so that the arrangements worked in conjunction with the cosmic forces to support happiness and prosperity. This approach stands in stark contrast to our Western predilection for using bulldozers to shape the landscape to fit our needs.

Among Native Americans we find an expression that is quite similar to the special connection which bound the Chinese of ancient times to the world around them. In referring to the hallowed source of nurturance that the Earth element symbolizes, they would say, “Behold, it is very sacred.” Here is a statement from that tradition:

The Lakota loved the earth and all things of the earth, the attachment growing with age. The old people came literally to love the soil and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power. It was good for the skin to touch the earth and the old people liked to remove their moccasins and walk with bare feet on the sacred earth. Their tipis were built upon the earth and their altars were made of earth. The birds that flew in the air came to rest upon the earth and it was the final abiding place of all things that lived and grew. The soil was soothing, strengthening, cleansing, and healing. In talking to children, the old Lakota would place a hand on the ground and explain: “We sit in the lap of our Mother. From her we, and all other living things, come. We shall soon pass, but the place where we now rest will last forever.”²⁵

In the *I Ching*, the hexagram that corresponds to the element Earth is the double trigram of *K'un*, the Receptive, composed of six *yin* lines, ☷. This image “represents nature in contrast to spirit, earth in contrast to heaven, space as against time, the female-maternal as against the male-paternal.”²⁶ Though the movement of the Creative is considered the invisible origin of life, it is the Receptive aspect that brings things to manifestation in the world. According to the teachings of this revered text, the qualities that define this energy are acceptance, devotion, and action in conformity with the situation. Often in life we face situations where there are forces at work that are beyond our control—for example, in dealing with chronic illness. In these cases, to act from the Earth

and “let oneself be led” creates the openness from which the best possible outcome can emerge:

If [the superior person] knows how to meet fate with an attitude of acceptance, he is sure to find the right guidance. [He] lets himself be guided; he does not go ahead blindly, but learns from the situation what is demanded of him and then follows this intimation from fate.²⁷

The season of the Earth element is the late summer, the period of abundance and fullness. The sun is not quite so high in the sky, offering relief from the relentless heat of summer. The crops are ready to be picked, and all of nature is pregnant with life. This is a time when there is fulfillment and nourishment in the natural world. Viewing the human condition as an extension of nature, Earth energy is needed to bring forth a harvest in our lives. The ability to reach completion is governed by this element, and those who chronically fail to reap what they have sown may have an imbalance here. A point on the Stomach channel, *Abundant Splendor* (Stomach 40), expresses the energy of this phase in the movement of the elements and can support this process in the individual. Following the *sheng* cycle, we can appreciate that this harvest is the culmination of the birth, growth, and maturation inherent in the Wood and Fire phases.

It is common to deal with Earth issues through feeding ourselves, and we so often reach for food, not out of hunger, but to provide the support and comfort that is the essence of this element. Eating disorders, in general, can result from an imbalance here, and compulsive overeating may be an attempt to bring in from the outside what is lacking on the inside. Once the problem is understood as stemming from a disturbance in the internal energies, it is obvious why the external solution of finding the right diet never seems to bring lasting results. A more wholistic approach would

involve discovering healthier ways to support the Earth within. Anorexia and bulimia, situations where being deprived of the source of nourishment can actually lead to starvation, represent the other side of this same elemental disharmony.

In human affairs, the Earth element represents stability, grounding, and support. We find these qualities emphasized in the Asian martial arts, where students of these traditions practice sinking their energy in order to stay in contact with the earth. The perils of losing one's root are quickly learned in this arena, as the person standing on tiptoe finds himself thrown to the ground. When anyone is deprived of the energy of Earth there can be tremendous insecurity. This became dramatically evident following a major earthquake in California in 1989, as people were unable to rely on a solid foundation and experienced a nervousness and instability that pervaded their very being. Earth literally provides the container within which all of life can unfold.

The officials of this element are the Stomach and Spleen. As the minister responsible for taking in nourishment, the Stomach is the place where food enters the body to begin the process of being broken down and transformed for use. The Spleen, in Chinese medicine, is concerned with distribution throughout the *body/mind/spirit* of the energy obtained from digestion. Proper nutrition is essential for these functions to be healthy, and eating the majority of our food from organic sources grown close to home is a way to provide the optimum building blocks for this element. Together, these officials do the work of the Earth element within a human being. When out of balance on the physical level, a person will not be well nourished, and the result is fatigue, lethargy, and lack of energy. Conditions such as hypoglycemia or diabetes reflect extremes in the body's ability to maintain consistent levels of nutrients.

In the realm of feelings, Earth is *the Great Mother* and is associated with the emotion of sympathy. In family dynamics, individuals often bring in different elements, filling the niches that together

make a whole. The person who is the *container* for the rest of the household, feeding and supporting the others, is generally operating from the Earth element. Usually in Western culture this role falls to the mother, but any member may hold this space. When taken to the extreme, these tasks can lead to excessive worry and concern, as witnessed in the behavior of someone who is always trying to take care of everyone else. Turned inward, the excessive sympathy of an Earth pattern produces the P.L.O.M. syndrome (poor little old me),²⁸ where a person is constantly feeling sorry for him or herself and seeking sympathy. Coupled with the insecurity that is characteristic of this element when out of balance, the lack of containment of Earth can manifest on the mental level in excessive thinking, obsessions, and nightmares.

Trying to keep others happy is, of course, doomed to failure, and this kind of overinvolvement can quickly become sickeningly sweet (the flavor of Earth). It frequently creates resentment in both the care giver and those being cared for, despite the noblest of intentions. Finding a balance with these issues is particularly challenging for parents, who need to be there for their children during the formative years and then must allow them to make their own mistakes as they reach adulthood. The act of letting go is actually more appropriate to this stage of parenting and is certainly healthier in the larger picture. Since it demands a complete reversal of what was asked earlier, this change in behavior needs to be practiced. One approach is for the parent to repeat the following phrase as many times as is necessary to reprogram the old patterns: "I love you, and I have no opinion."²⁹

The spiritual expression of Earth is *yi*, usually translated as thought. In the martial arts, this quality is considered the intention that directs the movement. Since the ability to be truly empathetic and maintain a caring attitude is a direct expression of this element, the meaning of *yi* may actually be closer to thoughtfulness. Professor Worsley loved to share the image of those round, jolly people behind

the counter in the bakeries as the true servers of humanity, providing the sweet taste that keeps everyone content. He would relish the contrast with certain ascetic, judgmental types sometimes found in the health food store, drawn to their imbalance in an obsession with the purity of food, yet unable to nourish themselves or others.

CASE HISTORY: A classic example of an Earth pattern involved an Hispanic woman who came in for treatment complaining of digestive difficulties. The history made it clear that her symptoms flared up whenever her son, who was an alcoholic, started drinking. Always a caring parent, she was clearly overinvolved and co-dependent in his illness. The goal of our work together was to find a way for her to separate from his actions and learn to take care of herself. The roots of her imbalance in Earth could be traced to the death of her own mother at an early age. When her father remarried a woman who had little concern for her, she found herself in a family situation where no nourishment or care was available. Interestingly, as a teenager she developed heavy menstrual bleeding (a symptom of the Spleen official) and, feeling that she had no one to share this problem with, she became severely anemic and weak.

It is amazing what results can emerge within the context of a nurturing, therapeutic relationship (especially for an Earth person who thrives on sympathy). After a full year of receiving acupuncture, this woman finally felt ready to share a very painful secret that had dominated her life. Evidently, while still a child, she was with a babysitter when her younger sister wandered into the street and was hit by a car. To protect herself, the caretaker made up a story to cover up the truth, instructing the patient to participate in this lie. At the time she finally revealed the secret to me, she had held this dark memory inside for over fifty years. Once she brought these events into the light, she could begin to heal a wound that had created an enormous sense of guilt and contributed to multiple symptoms in the Earth element throughout her life.

As we become adults, it is important to maintain humility and not take ourselves too seriously. Through a connection to the universal Earth Mother we can retain the openness and freshness that is the hallmark of children. Inevitably, we reach a time in our lives when our personal parents are no longer with us. One way to overcome the death of a loved one, and find the courage to go on, is to make a shift from the personal to the archetypal level. Establishing this sort of “religious perspective” is a vital step, as it allows us to receive support from an eternal source of nourishment, independent of our individual story, that is always available to us. This contemporary poem expresses the sentiments that arise in the face of such a pervasive loss:

Mother of my birth, for how long were we together
in your love and my adoration of your self?
For the shadow of a moment as I breathed your pain
and you breathed my suffering,
as we knew of shadows in lit rooms that would swallow
the light.

Your face beneath the oxygen tent was alive but your eyes
were closed.
Your breathing was hoarse but your sleep was with death.
I was alone with you as it was when I was young
but only alone now and not with you.
I was to be alone forever as I was learning, watching you
become alone.

Earth is your mother as you were mine, my earth,
my sustenance, my comfort and my strength
and now without you I turn to your mother
and seek from her that I may meet you again
in rock and stone: whisper to the stone,
I love you; whisper to the rock, I found you;
whisper to earth, Mother, I have found my mother
and I am safe and always have been.³⁰

METAL: CONNECTION TO THE SPIRIT

Lord, the air smells good today, straight from the mysteries
within the inner courts of God.

A grace like new clothes thrown
across the garden, free medicine for everybody.

The trees in their prayer, the birds in praise,
the first blue violets kneeling.

Whatever came from Being is caught up in being,
drunkenly forgetting the way back. . . .³¹

—Rumi



Metal

Perhaps the most difficult element to grasp, Metal symbolizes the spirit that brings meaning and purpose to existence. This is the unnamable mystery behind the origin of being, the essence within all things. Metal belongs to the Creative principle, in contrast to the manifestations on the material plane that are aspects of the Receptive. Rather than the world of creation, it is the spirit underlying the creation of the world. If Earth is the Great Mother, then Metal is the archetype of the Father, the heavenly energy that, when planted within, initiates life. Without this invisible seed, the land remains barren.

On the concrete level, Metal is the minerals and precious jewels found within the earth. These substances provide strength and value, and are symbols of endurance. They give the soil quality, enabling it to nourish the plant world. We find the creative-cycle of the elements in nature, as the earth forms the mountains that are composed of metal ore, which, in turn, give rise to the streams and waterfalls that carry the water essential for all life. Metal is also the rocks in the riverbeds that preserve water by keeping it from sinking back into the ground. As has been mentioned earlier, because of its association with the heavens, Metal can be compared to Air in the

four-element model used in Western astrology. Since the rain falls from the skies, we have another example of the mother-child relationship of Metal as the creator of Water.

In the seasonal rhythm, Metal is the energy of the autumn. Rather than a focus on activity and expansion, we now experience a contraction in the *ch'i*. Along with the inexorable process of letting go, this season holds a great sense of quality and meaning, which is apparent on a quiet stroll in the forest during the autumn time. As a Chinese poet once observed, “No leaf is spared for its beauty, and no flower because of its fragrance.” From earth, our thoughts turn toward heaven; this is the phase in the cycle of the energies for returning to the Source and connecting to the larger spirit of life. It is no accident, for example, that the High Holidays in the Jewish religion occur at this time of year. As followers of this tradition stand before *the Holy of Holies* to accept the sacred covenant, it is a time for gaining perspective on the accomplishments of the preceding year and making peace with the Creator. This is an intention entirely consistent with the Chinese view of Metal. Rilke’s poem, “Autumn Day,” takes us on a journey through the late summer and into the mood of this element:

Lord: it is time. The huge summer has gone by.
Now overlap the sundials with your shadows,
and on the meadows let the wind go free.

Command the fruits to swell on tree and vine;
grant them a few more warm transparent days,
urge them on to fulfillment then, and press
the final sweetness into the heavy wine.

Whoever has no house now, will never have one,
Whoever is alone will stay alone,
will sit, read, write long letters through the evening,
and wander on the boulevards, up and down,
restlessly, while the dry leaves are blowing.³²

For humans, Metal is our link to the Eternal and, as such, provides meaning to life. It is a symbol of the spiritual dimension that brings a purpose beyond the individual ego. This element holds the *transcendent function*, conveying a sense of reverence as we stand in awe before the wonder of creation. With it comes the capacity for belief,³³ the ability to give oneself over to “the Great Mystery that is,”³⁴ a dimension beyond the rational mind. If this element is lacking, there can only be the deepest existential despair. Despite an accumulation of material objects or intellectual accolades, when the quality of Metal is missing a person experiences grief and isolation. Why go on? Why bother? What’s the point?—these questions reflect the anguish of someone for whom this source of inner strength is unavailable. Once I inquired of a patient whether his struggle with illness contained any teaching for him. His response demonstrated an abyss of spiritual emptiness: “There’s no meaning, and it wouldn’t matter if there was meaning! And what does this have to do with acupuncture needles?” As might be expected, he dropped out of treatment before we could find out.

Metal is the great leveler, as it enables us to transcend the limits of the physical world. We see in the stories of saints and holy men and women the common pattern of being so connected to the spirit that they willingly throw off possessions. For the rest of us, a sense of the quality inherent in existence is a prerequisite for being content with the simple gifts of life. Even illness and the final loss, death itself, can be held with equanimity when we are in touch with the eternal aspects represented by this element. Metal brings a nonmaterial reality that allows us to penetrate the veil of illusion and let go of attachments.

Without this essence there is endless searching—and even a Nobel prize would not be enough to bring peace. Workaholics who are obsessed with the need for recognition and achievement may be, underneath, desperately seeking a sense of value and meaning.

Money, the chief idol of Western culture, is made of metal, and those who are driven to amass huge fortunes may be compensating for a deficiency in this element. Wearing an inordinate amount of jewelry can be yet another attempt to gain from the outside something that can, in the end, only be found within. In an attempt to know the energy of Metal, people go on life-long quests and pursue countless spiritual paths. Even in this undertaking, we cannot escape the very human tendency to acquire external signs of accomplishment, what can be called “spiritual materialism.”³⁵ If the teacher is doing his or her job, however, the student will not be directed toward measurable goals—not even the goal of enlightenment—but to the cultivation of a genuine presence of the spirit on the inside.

Jung felt that, especially in the second half of life, a religious perspective was essential if the individual was to adjust to reality and avoid undo neuroses. This theme is found in the *I Ching*, where we are advised to “understand the transitory in the light of the eternity of the end.”³⁶ If we are unable to see meaning beyond the personal self, then our sense of worth is bound up with something that is ultimately time-limited and destined to decay. As a result, an imbalance in Metal is commonly associated with low self-esteem. Speaking of neuroses, we can see this pattern expressed in the joke, used by Woody Allen but originating with Groucho Marx, “I would never want to belong to any club that would have someone like me for a member.”

I find it reassuring that even in the world of science, if we are willing to stay in the question, we are bound to be confronted with the realm of mystery, symbolized by the Metal element. The theory of the *Big Bang* explains much about the workings of the universe, but if we ask what came before that event, then we are face to face with the archetypal image of God, the symbol of the unknowable Source of creation. Albert Einstein, in his pursuit of a *Unified Field Theory*, had a strong sense of the one truth that underlies all of existence:

The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty. . . .³⁷

Within the Metal element are the Colon and Lung officials. The Colon is the minister of elimination, responsible for letting go of toxins, food wastes, and everything that does not nurture us. This ability to get rid of impurities is essential for the quality of Metal. Since there is no way to take in if we are too filled up, it is the empty space created by the Colon that allows the minister of the Lung to do her job as the receiver of pure *ch'i* from the heavens. Through the *inspiration* of the Lung official, we literally bring in the spirit.

On the physical level, disturbances in these two officials can be expressed in the many diseases that involve the organs of the colon and lungs. On a deeper level, we can appreciate the wisdom of these two functions in dealing with grief, the emotion related to Metal. We frequently have no choice but to first allow this feeling to wash over us and simply let go, as is typically done through tears. It is then possible to use the breath to connect to a transcendent presence. On the level of the mind, a problem in the Colon official, resulting in mental constipation and retention of negative messages, or in the Lung official, interfering with the ability to receive, can be equally devastating to self-esteem.

An imbalance in this element on the spirit level results in emptiness on the inside and a sense of meaninglessness to events on the outside. In dealing with drug addictions, which often have a spiritual problem at their root, we find groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Allanon instructing their members to "let go and let God," a teaching that reflects the function of these two officials. In contrast to a person with a disharmony in Fire, who may feel life is not worth liv-

ing after the loss of a relationship but lights right up when the next prospect comes along, those who actually complete the act of suicide have often suffered terribly from being cut off from Metal. The spiritual resource is *p'o*, translated as the animal-soul, which enters our being with the first breath from heaven.

To treat an imbalance in Metal, acupuncturists commonly use the point known as *the Great Eliminator* (Colon 4). Also known as *the Joining of the Valleys*, it can be located by following up the thumb side of the second metacarpal bone to the place where it joins the first metacarpal. Pressing deeply on this spot produces a deep ache in most people. This is probably the most often needled point in all of Chinese medicine. Since the Colon pathway extends up to the face, facilitating the process of letting go in this region (be it of congestion, pain, or held-in emotions), Colon 4 addresses headache, dental pain, allergic rhinitis, and sinusitis. It is the point usually stimulated with electric current in acupuncture anesthesia for surgery on the head, and it can also be treated for problems in the colon organ. Whereas *the Great Eliminator* has more of a body emphasis, *Support and Rush Out* (Colon 18) deals with deep abandonment issues and is more directed to the spirit level. Belonging to a family of points located on the head and neck known as *Windows to the Sky*, it can facilitate the letting go of the most severe losses by allowing them to be seen in the light of eternity.

Along the Lung meridian we find *the Very Great Abyss* (Lung 9), a point commonly used for respiratory symptoms. On a deeper level, its image captures the depths of a Metal despair. Based on the principle that “like cures like,” treating this point when a person is in a hole of grief enables their experience to be acknowledged, bringing them out of isolation and opening the way toward healing. Also on this pathway we find *Cloud Gate* (Lung 2), a spirit point which brings another teaching in the importance of balance. A dysfunction in Metal may result in someone being too much in the

spirit, so focused on the heavens that they fail to live their life on the earth. In this case, the goal of treatment is to close the gate. On the other hand, a person who is out of touch with anything beyond the material plane needs to have his *Cloud Gate* opened so that he can be receptive to the realm of the sacred.

CASE HISTORY: The features of an imbalance in Metal were powerfully demonstrated in the situation of a woman who developed asthma later in life. Despite the most current treatments with bronchodilators and steroid inhalers, the problem was not clearing and her ability to get an adequate breath was becoming more and more compromised. In addition, she was feeling increasingly depressed and described a general loss of purpose. A detailed inquiry uncovered a terrible tragedy: her three-year-old child had been hit by a car while playing in the driveway and died on the way to the hospital. The asthma, it turns out, began exactly on the one-year anniversary of this event. Significantly, the family history brought to light a much earlier loss, as her father had abandoned the family during her childhood. This impacted her Metal element at a formative time, setting the stage for the devastation to her spirit with the death of her child later in life. This woman had certainly experienced a series of overwhelming losses that had a damaging effect on the energy pattern of the Lung. The imbalance, in time, manifested on all levels, including the disease we call asthma, the emotion of grief, and, on the deepest stratum, in being unable to receive life energy from the heavens.

Treatment included a range of modalities: psychotherapy, *ch'i kung* breathing exercises, meditation practice, as well as acupuncture and herbs to address the officials of Metal. Since it was primarily a spirit level problem (though expressions existed on all levels), the points Support and Rush Out and Cloud Gate proved essential components of the acupuncture therapy. Western pharmaceutical agents were needed to support her breathing, and they were continued throughout the imple-

mentation of these complementary approaches. In the end, the pain of losing a child is something that can never be cured but, as the underlying pattern was addressed in a compassionate manner, the memory no longer dominated her entire being, and the woman could gradually reconnect to other areas of life. Eventually, she developed enough trust to have another child. Some years later, she became a volunteer at the local hospice in order to support parents who had suffered similar losses. Through turning this tragedy into an opportunity to help others, she found meaning in her suffering and this further supported her Metal element. It was at this point that she could finally give up her dependence on inhalers. As is true for many who find themselves functioning under the archetype of “the Wounded Healer,” the ultimate way to heal themselves is to assist in the healing of others.

There are two levels in dealing with grief, and we need to be able to hold both. When it comes to human emotions, the pain can be truly unbearable, and there is nothing to do but be with the feelings as they arise and let them go. On the level of the spirit, however, there is work that can be done, and it is here that one can find peace. Through uncovering the hidden message, events are linked to a greater purpose and that offers the possibility of acceptance. Jung once observed that “meaning makes a great many things endurable—perhaps everything.”³⁸ It was only through a connection to a spiritual dimension, and then using her experience in a meaningful way to assist others in the community, that this woman could eventually transcend her pain and recommit to life. Metal is associated with grief and yet, within the essence of this element, we find the cure for this emotion. Again, the words of Rumi serve as a signpost pointing a way toward the Eternal presence:

Don't Grieve.

Anything you lose comes around in another form.

The child weaned from mother's milk
now drinks wine and honey mixed.

God's joy moves from unmarked box to unmarked box,
from cell to cell.

As rainwater, down into flowerbed.

As roses, up from ground.

Now it looks like a plate of rice and fish,

Now a cliff covered with vines,

Now a horse being saddled.

It hides within these,

till one day it cracks them open.

. . . *Fa'ilatun, fa'ilatun, fa'ilatun fa'ilat*

There's the light gold of wheat in the sun,

and the gold of bread made from wheat. . . .

I have neither, I am only talking about them,

as a town in the desert looks up

at stars on a clear night.³⁹

WATER: RETURN TO THE MYSTERIOUS STILLNESS

The highest form of goodness is like water.

Water knows how to benefit all things
without striving with them.

It stays in places loathed by all men.

Therefore, it comes near the Tao.⁴⁰

—Lao Tzu



Water

There are many kinds of water in nature, and the range of expressions are truly staggering. From the freshness and vitality of a bubbling brook to the awesome strength of a raging river, from the dramatic crash of a waterfall to the tranquil peace of a mountain lake, from the gentle simplicity of a pond to the power and mystery of the ocean, we observe immense contrasts. Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, uses the qualities of water to teach about the Way of life:

Nothing in the world is softer and weaker than water;
 But, for attacking the hard and strong, there is nothing like it!
 For nothing can take its place.
 That the weak overcomes the strong, and the soft overcomes the hard,
 This is something known by all, but practiced by none.⁴¹

In fact, “Water is the essence of life and is therefore Lao Tzu’s favorite image of the Tao.”⁴² Water extends everywhere and gives life without asking for anything in return. To be bathed by it brings cleansing and purification. Of all things most yielding, it flows easily and gracefully, free of attachment and striving. Without effort (*wu wei*), water fills the tiniest point, willingly taking the shape of its container as it follows nature’s course. Its downward descent, always seeking the low ground, provides a fundamental principle for acting according to the Tao. And, in the many forms it takes, we see a metaphor for the cycles of life’s transformations. In Chinese culture, Water is a recurrent symbol that holds great wisdom for following a simple lifestyle in harmony with one’s environment:

When once the Primal Simplicity diversified, different names
 appeared.
 Are there not enough names now?
 Is this not the time to stop?
 To know when to stop is to preserve ourselves from danger.
 The Tao is to the world what a great river or an ocean is
 to the streams and brooks.⁴³

The season of the Water element is, of course, the wintertime. The vegetative force is quiet now, the bears seek to hibernate, and everything descends into the peaceful darkness of the season. At this time the rains bring freshness and, through *non-doing*, everything is renewed. This period of stillness holds the seed for the births to come. It is the rest of winter that allows the reservoirs to fill up, so

there can be water to feed a new cycle of activity and growth in the world. This element is indeed *the river of life*, bringing vitality to all growing things. In this role, we can appreciate the *sheng* cycle: Water as the mother of the Wood element. The cycle of creation extends on to the Fire element, as the luxurious expression in the summertime depends on the potential contained within the seed. This relationship between Water and Fire embodies the principle of mutual transformation between complements that is captured in the *yin/yang* symbol: at the time of most *yin*, *yang* is born. Though it may be the darkest time of the year, the models of the ancient Chinese remind us that after winter there will be a new birth in spring.

In the human realm, to follow the energy of this element is to withdraw from outside activity and allow oneself to rest. Only through stillness can we build the reservoirs of energy essential for the movement to follow. In the *I Ching*, the hexagram *The Turning Point* depicts the winter solstice. Built from the trigrams *Chen*, the Arousing, within, and *K'un*, the Receptive, without, it is an image for the return of the light after a time of total darkness. We can see this in the structure of the hexagram, which has one *yang* line entering from below, while all the remaining lines are *yin*, ☷. As is typical, the *I Ching* takes a pattern in nature and extrapolates it to the human condition:

The winter solstice has always been celebrated in China as the resting time of the year—a custom that survives in the time of rest observed at the new year. In winter the life energy, symbolized by thunder, the Arousing, is still underground. Movement is just at its beginning; therefore it must be strengthened by rest so that it will not be dissipated by being used prematurely. This principle, i.e., of allowing energy that is renewing itself to be reinforced by rest, applies to all similar situations. The return of health after illness, the return of understanding after an estrangement: everything must be treated tenderly and with care at the beginning, so that the return may lead to a flowering.⁴⁴

There is a tremendous inner resource contained within Water. It brings a cleansing and purification that is necessary for transformation to occur. No wonder immersion in water is built into the ritual of baptism, and bathing in the Ganges is one of the highest goals in Hinduism. Fluidity is the essence of this energy, and the fundamental question for a person in this regard is whether he can move easily with the stream of life. In dealing with the stifling effects of fear, the emotion associated with the Water element, the ability to go with the flow can overcome rigidity, permitting movement and change. On the deepest level, there is nothing more devastating than stagnation, as it is said that the spirit needs to move more freely than anything else.

Crossing the great waters has, since time immemorial, been a metaphor for the spiritual quest. Indeed, a spiritual practice needs to be constantly rejuvenated and that requires the qualities of Water. To participate in the lessons of this element is to experience silent contemplation and stillness, to go inside and descend into the depths and into the mystery of life. In Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*, meditation on the river, which forever changes yet remains eternally the same, brings enlightenment to the hero of the story. It is no accident that, in Jungian psychology, the ocean is a symbol for the unconscious and for mystical oneness. "Pour your drop into my ocean and become the universe that is you," is an apt description of the giving up of the ego that allows merging with the Divine. In sticking to the lowly, Water is a teacher for following the Way:

How does the sea become the king of all streams?
Because it lies lower than they!
Hence it is the king of all streams.
Therefore, the Sage reigns over the people by humbling
himself in speech;
And leads the people by putting himself behind. . . .
Just because he strives with nobody,
Nobody can ever strive with him.⁴⁵

The officials of the Water element are the Bladder and Kidney. The Bladder is the minister in charge of the storage of fluids and maintains the reservoirs of energy. The Kidney is more concerned with the distribution and balance of water. Known as “the storehouse of the vital-essence,” it contains the inherited potential for how our lives can unfold. Together these officials hold the source of vitality for all the other officials, and we consider them whenever there are complaints of depletion and exhaustion. On the physical level, fluids and secretions are governed by these functions (urination is only one part of the work of these officials). According to Chinese medicine, the hormones and the entire endocrine system depend on Water. In general, this element provides the fluidity needed for any movement, and stiffness and rigidity may be symptoms of a Water imbalance. The function of the joints is considered here, since it is synovial fluid that maintains their flexibility. The bones are fortified by this element, an association that derives from the power of “emphasis” in the winter season. It is as if problems in Water, involving as they do the seed of energy, take us down to bare bones. Conditions that reflect a disharmony in this element are therefore wide ranging and include arthritis, back pain, edema, urinary problems, endocrine disorders, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue syndrome.

The Water element bathes the *body/mind/spirit* and, when out of balance, we find that symptoms manifest on all levels. Rigidity of the mind is far more devastating than it is in the body, as the inability to flow can restrict the range of possibilities, preventing a person from thinking effectively. Within the field of the emotions, a disturbance here can result in all kinds of phobias; in the extreme, seizing up with fear may produce a paralysis that dominates our being. In essence, Water holds the potential that determines who we can be. The *ancestral ch'i*, the unique energy handed down through our family lineage, which includes gifts and strengths as well as imperfections, is stored in the Kidney. In the treatment room we may see patients for whom the

spirit has literally died, and acupuncturists can treat this condition with a point on this meridian, *the Spirit Burialground* (Kidney 24), which functions as a baptism to resurrect the spirit. The spiritual resource for this element is the *chih*, usually translated as will or ambition. It is the deep internal power that allows a person to overcome obstacles and stay true to one's purpose, despite whatever fears may arise.

In the Five Element model, Water is the end of the cycle and the earliest beginnings of the one to follow. It is the return into the mysterious stillness that makes the subsequent coming forth into the fullness of life possible. This pattern of *death and rebirth* is certainly an integral part of the healing process, where illness may ask us to confront fears and go into the unknown. Quite often, something needs to die for the new to be born. This may mean giving up a career, a relationship, an attitude, or a destructive behavior, and facing the uncertainty of not knowing what is to happen next. The pattern is a recurrent theme in the poetry of Rilke, who says, "Whoever lets go in his fall, dives into the source and is healed."⁴⁶ The ability to enter this dark part of the cycle is an act that requires faith, allowing us to embrace the wholeness of the human experience. It is an archetype that plays out in every winter season, and one in which we participate, in the course of the circle of life's energies (Figure 9):

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
Which shall be the darkness of God. . . .
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting. . . .

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁴⁷

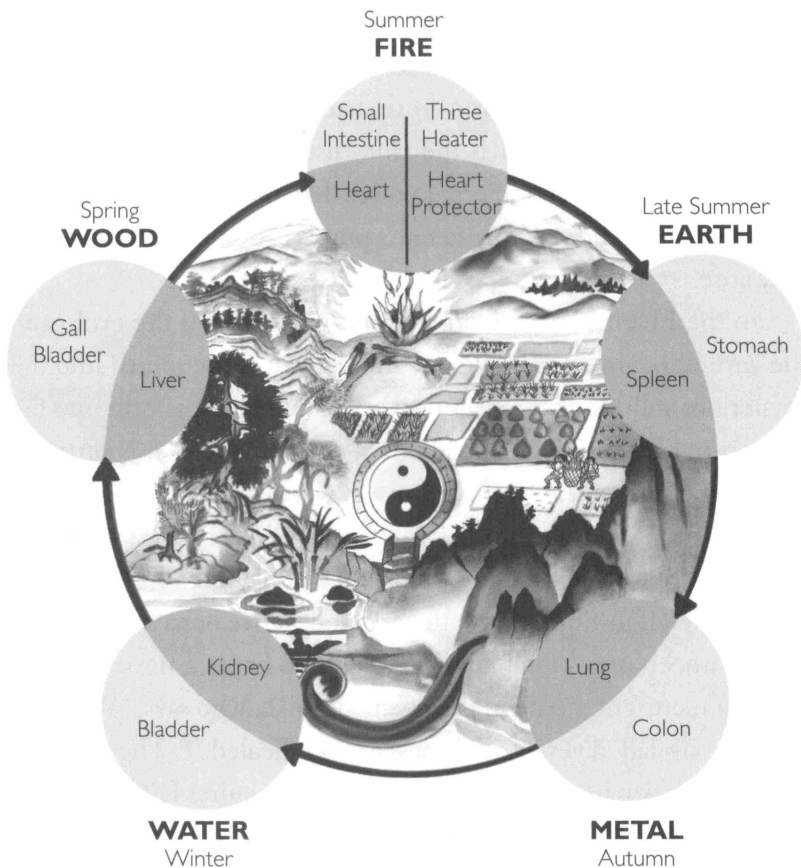


Figure 9. A Five Element Landscape

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26. *I Ching*, Hexagram 2, *The Receptive*, p. 10.
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28. My thanks to Fritz Smith for identifying this pattern of behavior.
29. Jim Zeno, Birthday conversations, November 2000. This statement reflects the wisdom that can only be gleaned from the experience of parenthood.

30. David Ignatow, "Kaddish," in *News of the Universe*, ed. Robert Bly (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980), p. 179 (italics added).
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33. Of course, *belief* may be only an initial step in the process of coming to full maturity in the Metal element. When asked in an interview late in life whether he believed in God, Jung replied with characteristic depth, "I don't need to believe, I know."
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CHAPTER 6

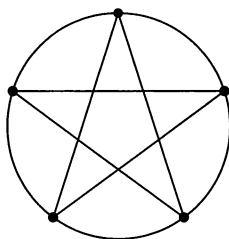
CF, The Central Focus

Our Primary Imbalance and the Place from which We Shine

In order to treat and cure diseases,
one must search into their origin.¹

—*The Yellow Emperor*

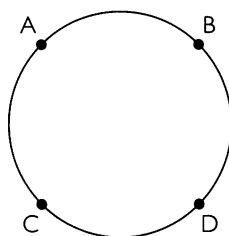
In working within the Five Element framework, there is a natural tendency to feel that some imbalance exists in every one of the elements. This is a common experience when studying this model, and it is actually a measure of the power of these symbols to express what it means to be human. We each manifest all of the elements, and the positive qualities that enhance our lives, as well as the weaknesses with which we struggle, can be effectively captured through these images. As a result, in seeking to restore health, the inclination may be to attend to every presenting pattern and jump all around the cycle. Most practitioners find greater effectiveness, however, in holding the energies within a person as a unity and approaching treatment in a more systematic fashion. This is possible since the elements are interconnected; each is in relationship with all the others through the *sheng* and *k'o* cycles. We can appreciate the uniqueness of the number *five* in the way that, within this circular arrangement, every element either influences or is influenced by every other one:



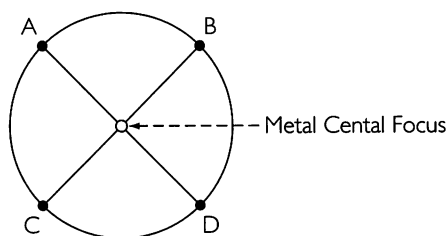
Professor Worsley, who more than anyone else brought the Five Element system to the West, developed the term *Causative Factor* to refer to the one element that originally became out of balance and now underlies disturbances in all the others. Restoring health to this element will, in turn, influence the whole, allowing us to address a vast array of symptoms with very few acupuncture points. This notion is consistent with the way medicine was practiced in ancient China, where the highest ideal was the *su wen* treatment, “the curing of a thousand diseases with a single needle.” Focusing on the root of the condition provides an organizing principle that is crucial for bringing clarity to the situation. For example, if an individual is frustrated because there is no growth in his life, and we can trace this problem in Wood to depleted reserves (i.e., he is running on empty), then the most effective intervention is to address the Water element, which happens to be the mother of Wood. As the primary energetic problem is corrected, symptoms expressed in the other elements can resolve and health is restored. The idea of a Causative Factor also exists in homeopathy, a system of medicine that shares the same commitment to influence the source of the condition on a deep energetic level.²

In this book, I have chosen instead to use the phrase *Central Focus*,³ which seems to be more consistent with the flavor of Chinese thinking. In the West we are wedded to the notion of *cause and effect*. If presented with a series of circumstances, say grief and asthma, we are likely to assume that one is the *cause* of the other. This ends up separating the mind and body, implying (as in psycho-

somatic medicine) that one level controls the other. The Chinese approach, in contrast, is based on *synchronicity* and would look for the pattern that reflects the meaning of the moment. In seeking a deeper insight, observations would be interpreted through one of the models for understanding *ch'i*. In place of: $A \longrightarrow B \longrightarrow C \longrightarrow D$, the manifestations of A=grief, B=asthma, C=constipation, D=weeping voice, could be organized in a circular form:



and clarity is provided to the situation by introducing the notion that an imbalance in the Metal element is *central* to all of these expressions. Our diagram then looks like this:



In this example, Metal is the Central Focus that describes the underlying pattern, bringing order to what initially seemed to be random occurrences or just bad luck. To hold the condition in this way instills meaning, while suggesting a practical strategy for treatment to address the fundamental disharmony.

A further distinction is that the idea of Causative Factor implies a development over time, whereas Central Focus stays more in the

moment and describes the current energetic configuration. Though they come from a slightly different perspective, both concepts share the same intention: to uncover a window into the roots of the disturbance in the *ch'i*. The terms are, in fact, inseparable, and the same acronym obviously works for both. The CF originates somewhere in the story of an individual, often in early family dynamics, and then finds expression as the central theme in the present. For instance, loss of one's father at an early age can result in an abyss of grief, and may be the historical source of a primary imbalance in Metal. This is then read in the current moment through the observation of a weeping voice, a white sheen on the skin, and a preoccupation with the search for meaning.

Likewise, having sympathy unavailable in the home can underlie Earth issues, an absence of joy as a child may lead to a disruption in the Fire element, living with anger often eventuates in Wood becoming the dominant element, and experiences that instill fear tend to produce a CF in Water. Together with anxiety and constitutional aspects, these roots of illness are known in Chinese medicine as the seven Internal Causative Factors of disease. There are also seven External Causative Factors that are described: wind, fire, heat, dampness, humidity, dryness, and cold. In the spirit of this model, infections and trauma could be included in the list of external factors.⁴ In many cases, we may uncover a double vector that creates an indelible pattern from that time on. A severe respiratory infection coming from without that attacks the lungs on the physical level, occurring at the same time that the parents' divorce results in the emotion of grief arising from within, may lock-in a CF in Metal for the remainder of a person's life.

The question is frequently asked whether a Central Focus is necessarily acquired during life, or if a person can be born with a predetermined energetic pattern. This is the age-old issue of heredity vs.

environment, nature or nurture.⁵ From the standpoint of psychology, the emphasis is usually placed on early childhood as the critical stage in the development of personality traits. The experience of parenting, however, leaves one with the impression that a child seems to come into this world with a characteristic theme that colors her life, for which the parents have little to say. We may be content, from the vantage of science, to explain these inherited tendencies through genetics and leave it at that. Those who accept the possibility of reincarnation would speak of karma, brought in from a previous existence, which needs to be worked out for the evolution of the soul. Even without a belief in a personal rebirth, recurring patterns in a particular family obviously exist and can dominate a person's destiny; the ancient Chinese would consider this the *ancestral ch'i* that is stored in the Kidney.

It may ultimately be impossible to determine whether the CF gets handed down through heredity or is acquired after birth. Yet, if there are unresolved issues in a lineage, it certainly may become a person's mission to work them through, and this may be reflected in the individual's underlying energetic pattern. Jung had the intuition that our ancestors are somewhere in another dimension, observing the outcome of our lives.⁶ Unable to affect events in the world themselves, the dead are dependent on us to find solutions for the problems they were unable to bring to resolution. For example, a history of abuse may typically emerge repeatedly in a family, as it is a common finding that a person who is abusive has himself been abused as a child. Through approaching this dysfunction with awareness, we can bring an element of choice to patterns that have been acted out unconsciously. Though painful memories persist, this at least spares the next generation from being exposed, and it stops the damaging behavior from continuing in the family history. In this way, destiny is fulfilled and our ancestors can find peace.⁷

Solving a problem for one's ancestral line brings a greater purpose to suffering and goes a long way, as well, toward healing the wounds inside.

The Central Focus is a way to understand the essence of an individual in terms of the elemental model. In assessing a CF, we seek to answer the question: who is this person and what is the characteristic pattern for her life? The cornerstone of diagnosis is the observable color, sound, emotion, and odor, which hold the clues to the basic energy that is being expressed. As we have seen, the content is of less importance. At times, however, a single sentence or action may quite dramatically expose the underlying imbalance. It may be the phrase, "I feel empty inside" that reveals a Metal CF, or an individual driving a flaming red Porsche that demonstrates a fixation with the Fire element. These are known as *golden keys*, as they provide insight into the energetic diagnosis. On one occasion, while teaching a class to a group of patients, I mentioned that a person's reaction to the weather could indicate her elemental tendencies. Someone lacking in Fire might seek warm surroundings, while those who have an abundance in this element tend to prefer the cold and, similarly, people have varied reactions to the wind (the climate associated with Wood). An older woman, who I knew to be a Wood CF, immediately interrupted in a loud, insistent voice, "What do you mean? Everybody hates the wind!" Here, in one statement, were three clues to her predominant energy: the shouting voice, her own extreme reaction to the climate of Wood, and the judgment that everyone should respond as she does (indicative of an overactive Gall Bladder official). Her statement was a golden key that was worth more than any extensive interview in revealing her central elemental diagnosis.

The ultimate value of the CF lies in its function as a tool that enables a practitioner of the Five Element system to penetrate

beneath the facade and address the most formative level. Once the primary pattern is uncovered, treatment can be directed to this deeper disharmony, and is then more likely to be effective. For example, a person who compulsively acts out sexually, seeking encounters with multiple partners, may certainly be expressing a dysfunction in Fire. However, the observation of a weeping voice and the emotion of grief, along with discovering that the core issue for the individual involves being cut off from spirit, leads to an entirely different conclusion. The origin of the destructive behavior may then lie, not in an attempt to find love, but in a futile effort to fill the emptiness inside. An appreciation that we are, in fact, dealing with a Metal CF brings with it a plan for healing. Helping the person to let go of negative messages in order to build self-esteem, while encouraging the development of a spiritual practice that provides meaning, will deal with the root of the situation; this is the therapeutic intervention that stands the best chance of initiating real change.

In Chinese tradition there is a saying that we may offer a starving person a fish, but that a far better solution is to provide a fishing pole. If we fail to plant the seeds in the springtime, there certainly will be no harvest in the late summer and, in addressing a situation where this is the essential energetic dynamic, it would be more useful in the long run to attend to the Wood element. However, correcting the immediate symptoms through supporting the Earth might stave off an imminent crisis of starvation. Clearly, in the interest of alleviating suffering, there is a place for both. As always, the consistent theme is balance, and how we approach the underlying elemental CF is no exception. In Chinese medicine this is known as “treating the roots and the branches,” a strategy that holds much practical wisdom in dealing with illness and with life in general.⁸

In addition to considering the dominant imbalance on the level of the individual, it is intriguing to look at the concept of the

Central Focus as it relates to social groups. It seems reasonable that those raised in the same family, community, or culture may share characteristic qualities that can be seen as belonging to a specific element. Whether the result of *ancestral ch'i* (heredity) or upbringing (environment) or both, the observation that certain energetic expressions are more frequently found among particular groups seems undeniable. For example, we can speculate about the tendencies toward a group CF that exists in members of various religious affiliations. Jews, for instance, who have a legacy of searching for meaning and spirit, often have issues in the Metal element. Catholics, raised with fear and guilt over violating rules of sexual conduct, may tend toward Water imbalances. The emphasis on *jihad* (spiritual warfare) in Islam can be associated with Wood CF's occurring more commonly among this group.⁹ The Indian religion Zoroasterism is known for its focus on Fire, and the emphasis in Buddhism on sitting in meditation and holding a steady center in the face of adversity can be interpreted as expressing themes around the Earth element. This is not meant to imply that all who share these religious backgrounds have the same elemental imbalance, only to demonstrate how the Five Element model can provide useful insights into patterns that exist on every level.



The element of the Central Focus, in clarifying the pervasive issues of life, can be seen to expose a person's weaknesses. Yet, true to the teaching of *yin/yang*, this element also expresses the individual's greatest strength. Though it may be seen as the place of struggle, this central theme contains many hidden gifts. Quite commonly, as we confront the ongoing challenges presented by our

primary imbalance, it becomes our *growing edge* and eventually transforms into “the place from which we shine.”¹⁰

We can appreciate what happens when the Wood element is out of balance and the anger that results when nothing is growing. There is also a very positive aspect to this energy, which involves the bursting forth into activity. Those with a Central Focus in Wood often have a special task in life that involves creativity. In particular, artists often have issues in this element, since they are constantly dealing with the tension of creation. It is fascinating, for instance, to observe the strong lines painted in the green color that are used in Van Gogh’s self-portrait. Artists can also be famous for the frustration that emerges when endeavors don’t go so well, as in the famous story of Van Gogh cutting off his ear. Beautiful expressions in works of art, as well as the perseverance to complete any project, require the focus and vision that stem from Wood.

Fire is the symbol of warmth, relationship, and true intimacy. For a person with a deficiency in this element, there can be a dependency on external connections that leads to bouncing between ecstasy and the depths of despair. Frequently, in their preoccupation with their own needs, those with a Fire imbalance can become rather self-absorbed and, in the end, not love very well. The positive expression of this element involves the ability to love, and the challenge for a person with a CF in Fire is to learn how to really do this without necessarily asking for anything in return. To love unconditionally, and yet find a way to keep a boundary and protect oneself in the process, is the ultimate goal here. The task associated with this element is compassion, the opening of one’s Heart to another.

The Earth element is *the Great Mother*, and the positive side is found in the thoughtfulness that allows a person to be truly present for the needs of others. The task involves caring and nurturing, and

any work of service can be seen as a reflection of this energy. Parenting, of course, requires this element, and can be considered the quintessential manifestation of Earth. Those drawn to the health fields are often motivated by a need to express these qualities as well, and it is quite common to find nurses with an Earth CF. When caring for others reaches the point where an individual becomes a martyr, sacrificing her own well-being in the process, it is typically a sign of Earth energy out of balance.

Embracing the spirit and finding the quality of life is the issue for someone with Metal as the primary element. The positive aspect is the spirituality that allows detachment from superficial matters and brings a higher purpose. The task of this element is to connect to meaning and inspiration. Those who are on a spiritual path, in search of enlightenment, may be motivated by a Central Focus in Metal. The relentless drive for achievement that is the mark of the workaholic, especially if the underlying purpose is to forge meaning, may also be driven by this element. We can see how any imbalance, when dealt with honestly and with integrity, can evolve into the finest expression of an individual. Those with a Metal CF, as they work through their life-long struggle for spirit, can eventually evolve into the Nobel Prize winners and the inspirational teachers for the next generation.

Since Water is associated with fear, those with a predominant imbalance in this element may find themselves seized up by this emotion. As we have seen, the CF presents us with the fundamental challenge on our path as well as the key to its resolution, and courage can be seen as the positive representation of this phase in the cycle. Water holds the deep reservoirs of energy and the potential for all that can unfold. The task of finding the inner strength to come forth into life depends upon this element, and this power allows the hidden seed to manifest in the world.

It is common in the work of self-growth to confront the same issues again and again. Often these recurrent patterns involve the element of the Central Focus. The feeling that we are “back to square one,” as we stumble on familiar mistakes, can at times seem frustrating. It may be helpful to reframe this process by considering growth to take place in a spiral fashion. Though we may circle places we have visited before, we can still visualize progress taking place in the vertical direction (Figure 10).¹¹ In fact, it is this very experience of returning to the old issues, as long as we are willing to accept responsibility and not blame external circumstances, which keeps us learning. Over time, we may find that we move through these tendencies more quickly and are less dominated by them. Indeed, through consciously embracing the tasks symbolized by our CF, there is considerable opportunity for transformation and change.

By understanding a wide range of manifestations in terms of a single element, we bring meaning to a personal story in terms of the universal experience of the elements. It is a journey of expanding awareness, as we discover our own unique connection to age-old

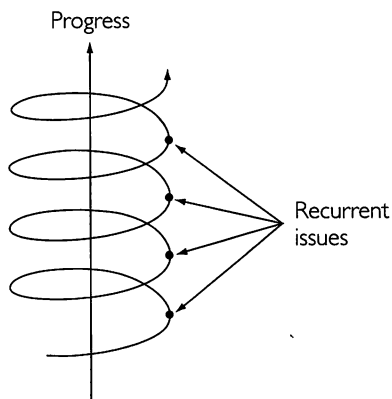


Figure 10. The Process of Growth

archetypal images. This act of linking life events to a bigger theme, in itself, has a healing effect.

NOTES

1. *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, trans. Ilza Veith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 115.
2. The phrase Causative Factor is not found in the Chinese literature and, indeed, it is likely that Worsley borrowed this term from homeopathy.
3. Zoe Brenner, a faculty member at the Traditional Acupuncture Institute, originally suggested *Central Focus* as an alternative to *Causative Factor*. Being able to use the acronym "CF" when referring to the primary elemental imbalance is a definite advantage, as it maintains consistency with the Worsleyan tradition in which most Five Element practitioners have been trained.
4. Addressing the emotional level that underlies symptoms (the Internal Causative Factors) is clearly the strength of the Five Element approach. TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine), the predominant system of medicine in China since the Communist revolution, has spread widely throughout the West. It developed from traditional roots in *yin/yang* philosophy and has a strong emphasis on herbs. Expressing the materialistic philosophy behind the politics of the People's Republic, it seems to be more effective for the physical-level conditions that stem from the External Causative Factors of disease.
5. As my young friend Adam Lefkowitz shrewdly reminds his parents, "nature or nurture, it's still your fault."
6. For more information on this topic, see the fascinating discussion found in Jung's autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, in the chapter entitled "On Life after Death."
7. This notion of pleasing the ancestors through our actions in the world, a highly regarded value in traditional Chinese culture, may be one of the meanings hidden within the image adopted by the famous San Francisco band *The Grateful Dead*.
8. As in homeopathy, controversy exists in the Five Element world between those who advocate exclusively treating the CF, relying on this one element to influence all the others, and those who use the CF as an organizing principle but emphasize addressing the energy of the moment. The first group, which includes J. R. Worsley, has the advan-

tage of a clarity and simplicity (less is more) that is consistent with ancient Chinese wisdom, allowing nature to make the changes in the other elements. The other approach—which is practiced by many of Worsley's most notable students, such as Fritz Smith, Jim McCormick, Bob Duggan, and Dianne Connelly—emphasizes the dynamic relationship of all the elements through the *sheng* and *k'o* cycles and empowers the practitioner to bring the system alive by being fully present to the energy that is showing up at any given time. From this second perspective, treatment is likened to peeling away layers of the onion that, over time, is seen to reach deeper levels. In my experience, some patients respond well to treating a single element, and others seem to require attending to issues in more than one element. I do not think either viewpoint can be absolutely true for all cases. *Ch'i*, after all, is a mystery.

9. On an emotional level, the anguished conflict between competing cultures in the Holy Land typically finds the Israelis holding grief (in the face of terrorist attacks that kill innocent civilians) and the Palestinians consumed with anger (over frustrated national aspirations). This difference in emotions is consistent with the tendency of the populations toward a predominant elemental CF in Metal and Wood, respectively, and contributes to the inability to hear the other side's point of view.

Having said this, it is also very true that this conflict has produced many Israelis responding out of anger and many grief-stricken Palestinians. Clearly, the vicious cycle of age-old hatreds, based on splitting off one's shadow and projecting it onto the enemy, can only reinforce similar responses from the other side. As Buddha once said, "Hatred never ceased by hatred, but by love alone is hatred healed. This is the ancient and eternal law."

10. The following discussion is an elaboration of the "positive aspect" and "task" for each element, listed in the Associations chart on p. 80.
11. Fritz Smith, M.D., Lectures on Zero Balancing, 1984.

Archetypal Patterns in Popular Culture

The Five Elements in the Television Series Seinfeld

Smoking is certainly one of the oddest and stupidest human idiosyncrasies. I love the ad campaign they had a few years ago on their anniversary, “75 years and still smoking.” Well, not everybody. I think there might be a few empty chairs at that big birthday bash. Maybe the appeal is the *fire*. There’s something very scary and exciting about fire. People always run to see a fire. This is what smoking is really all about. The power of “I’ve got some fire right here in my hand. Smoke and fire is literally coming right out of my mouth.”¹

—Jerry Seinfeld

One of the most remarkable things about the model of the Five Elements is the way that it shows up in the most unexpected places. Since the elemental patterns are based on ubiquitous energies, this should not be surprising. Whenever behaviors resonate with a deep chord in human nature, we are bound to be touching the archetypal level, and it is likely that we will encounter the realm of the elements. Take, for

example, the NBC television sitcom *Seinfeld* (1989–1998), which portrays four characters that make us laugh because they portray qualities that are all too human. In their personalities we repeatedly recognize traits found in ourselves and others around us. The popularity of the show's protagonists extends far beyond American culture, as people across the globe have regularly tuned in to follow their exploits. The question arises then, whether Jerry, Kramer, Elaine, and George might be expressing some of the energetic principles we have been discussing.

For instance, the episode in which Jerry feels sorry for the owner of a Pakistani restaurant is particularly instructive. As he observes the man through binoculars from his apartment window, Jerry is visibly distressed over the fact that there appear to be no customers. He literally sings his concern:

Look at this poor guy. His family's probably back in Pakistan.
They're waiting for him to send back money. This is horrible.

The excessive sympathy upon which this comment is based makes it clear that Jerry's Central Focus lies in Earth. His response to the reasonable suggestion that he move on, "I can't, I'm obsessed with it," reveals an inappropriate level of involvement that is typical for this underlying elemental pattern. Jerry is consumed with worry, making himself and others miserable in the process. When asked whether he has eaten in the place, his reply makes his dominant emotion obvious: "No, I'm afraid we'd start talking and I'd wind up going partners with him." This scene is an excellent demonstration of the way a sympathy that knows no bounds can turn into an obsession for an Earth person.

Compare this behavior with Jerry's response during another show, when a father approaches him in the coffee shop and relays the tragic story of how his immune-deficient son must spend his life

within a protective bubble of plastic. In contrast to Elaine, who upon hearing of the plight of the “Bubbleboy” uses her napkin to wipe away genuine tears, in this situation Jerry couldn’t care less. Preoccupied with his own concerns, he uses the napkin that is passed to him to instead wipe food from his mouth. When a specific emotion takes extreme opposite expressions, in this case vacillating between abundant sympathy and a total lack of sympathy, it suggests that the associated element (for Jerry, Earth) is the primary imbalance.

In another episode, Kramer, the neighbor across the hall, comes bursting into Jerry’s apartment full of exuberance for a new plan. In an unmistakably shouting voice he asks, “Who wants to have fun?” After receiving an affirmation from Jerry and George, he shouts again, “Are you just saying you want to have fun, or do you *really* want to have some fun?” True to their characters, Jerry answers, “I really want to have fun,” while George, who is prone to depression and negativity, responds with, “I’m just saying I want to have some fun.” It seems Kramer has acquired a supply of golf balls, and now shares his idea with his friends: “Why don’t we drive out to Rockaway and hit ‘em . . . into the ocean!” They wisely decline the invitation and, as is often the case when Wood energy is out of balance, things do not fare well in the end. Kramer returns angry and upset, revealing his dominant emotion by throwing his golf clubs on the floor and proceeding to kick them: “Hey, you want these? I don’t want them. I stink! . . . I have no concentration.” Again, the emotion that is most intense and out of balance points to the Central Focus, and for Kramer that element is most definitely Wood. We can see how frustration was the inevitable consequence of a plan that was a bit crazy to begin with. Furthermore, Kramer’s initial enthusiasm was bound to eventually hit an obstruction due to his lack of decisive thinking and his inability to focus. Both qualities are generally associated with Wood, and are necessary for new possibilities to manifest in the world.

There is, of course, the positive side of the Wood element, which Kramer aptly demonstrates in an excerpt that pokes fun at the Miss America pageant. Becoming the coach for one of the contestants, he proudly announces, "I'm taking this girl to the top, to the top Jerry, and you can't stop us!" His proclamation reflects the determination and vision that are valuable resources associated with Wood. Unfortunately for Kramer, and for the young woman whose fate it is to get involved with him, this element is way too dysfunctional for any of his far-reaching plans to stand any chance of becoming a reality.

No sitcom can be complete without the Fire type, who typically supplies much of the comic relief. The joy and warmth of this element is wonderfully embodied in the character of Elaine. The image of her falling in love, for example, is truly priceless. She enters Jerry's apartment totally lit up and transformed: "This is it Jerry, this is it. . . . He's a perfect man, I'm so lucky." Earlier in this same show, Elaine had walked out of a restaurant when she learned that the owner was against abortion, and Jerry slyly inquires if she knows her new boyfriend's views on this subject. "Well, I'm sure he's pro-choice," is her reply, and when Jerry asks how she knows, she follows with, "Because he's just so good looking," an answer that convinces neither herself nor Jerry. As Elaine faces the possibility of losing this newfound love, we see excessive joy plummet into a total lack of joy. Again, extremes in expression are the hallmark of an energetic imbalance, and Elaine's emotional swings are emblematic of a Fire CF. Since an individual with a deficiency in this element will, by definition, lack a sustained, balanced source of warmth on the inside, she can easily become overly dependent on external connections. Rejoicing to the heights can alternate in a moment with sinking into the depths of despair, as relationships flourish or fail. In Elaine's struggle to find love, we have an

excellent portrayal of the vicissitudes experienced by a person with issues in Fire.

Making relationships work is indeed the great challenge for the Fire element, and Elaine certainly has her share of difficulty in this arena. In an especially dramatic scene, she is ready to abandon her current boyfriend when he has bandages on his face following an accident that may have damaged his good looks. Prompted once again by Jerry, whose role in holding the center in the midst of the theatrics is characteristic of Earth, Elaine honestly confronts the superficial, self-centered focus of her intimate connections (the Small Intestine aspect of Fire brings the clarity that is required to look honestly at the truth). She speaks longingly of her search for love, the ultimate goal of anyone whose emotional dynamic centers in the Fire element:

Even if he is a hideous freak, you know, maybe I can learn to love him, and maybe in some final irony I can learn what love really is, you know Jerry.

Of course, Jerry is not even paying attention, another illustration of the recurring lack of sympathy that is a manifestation of his primary imbalance in Earth.

And then there is George, whose ability to create confusion, upset, and conflict all around, without ever accepting responsibility for his actions, is truly remarkable. His persistent and disturbing patterns of behavior suggest a more serious degree of pathology and, from a psychological perspective, he fits the criterion for a personality disorder. If the emotional definition for identifying this condition is “a person you consistently and desperately want to strangle,”² George definitely qualifies. As is common for those with this diagnosis, we find him constantly surrounded by chaos, yet totally oblivious to his role in the drama. There exist a number of sub-groups

within the personality disorder category, and George's level of hysteria suggests that, more specifically, he is a histrionic type. On the other hand, it could be pointed out that his lack of confidence and endless need for advice and reassurance, coupled with a manipulative stance that is motivated by the fear that he might have to take care of himself, make him a dependent type. Undoubtedly, George qualifies for both diagnoses. Incidentally, Kramer also nicely fits the criterion for a personality disorder, but is more likely a schizotypal pattern. Eccentricities, odd thinking and speech, and generally weird behavior characterize this group of individuals. Although Jerry and Elaine, in their self-importance, lack of empathy, and need for admiration, display many attributes of narcissism, they probably should not be considered narcissistic personality disorders. Their internal anxiety and ability to accept responsibility for their actions places their psychological diagnosis more in the category of neuroses.

Returning to our Five Element analysis, there may be some confusion over George's dominant elemental imbalance. This may, in part, be due to the pervasive level of his dysfunction, which is sure to involve a number of elements, and to the likely presence of more serious disturbances from the acupuncture perspective, such as Possession and Aggressive Energy. His puffed-up mask of bravado is obviously a compensation for low self-esteem, and one might initially conclude that George's primary imbalance lies in Metal. However, whenever his fear is tested, it becomes abundantly clear that this emotion is the driving force in his personality. In extreme situations, as for example when he and Kramer go mountain climbing, George is totally immobilized by the fear that he experiences. It could be argued that anyone would be frightened hanging from a rope on the side of a cliff, and so this might be considered an appropriate response. Yet, in another episode, we find that even the

smoke from food burning in the kitchen causes him to be overwhelmed by deep-seated fear, and he proceeds to knock over children and an old woman with a walker in a frantic effort to evacuate the apartment. This clearly excessive emotion reveals that George's CF must be Water. On occasion, he does demonstrate the other side of this element, as in the instance when, having pretended to be a marine biologist, he courageously strides into the ocean to rescue a stranded whale. An impressive display of lack of fear showing up in an individual who, in other situations, is terrified by the slightest threats, confirms that Water is the element most out of balance.

The degree to which the characters on the *Seinfeld* television series correspond to the Five Element model is so striking that one could wonder whether the writers themselves had studied Chinese philosophy. As is typical in working with universal images, we commonly find them arising independently, simply because they emanate from the collective unconscious of all people. The fact that the personalities on the sitcom consistently express qualities that fit the patterns of the elements is part of their world-wide appeal, whether we are aware of this connection or not.

Jerry, Kramer, Elaine, and George are all strangely familiar. We are engaged by the way they demonstrate our very human tendencies and then take these attributes to the level of the absurd, thereby allowing us to discharge tensions and laugh at our own seriousness. Jason Alexander, the actor who plays George on the show, offers insight into the function served by his character, and sums up the cathartic function the television series *Seinfeld* has played in popular culture:

When people reflected on their own lives in comparison to George's, they felt pretty good. No matter how bad life may have been for any given member of our audience, they could tune in and see it was far worse for this poor slob. In a sick way that was comforting.³

NOTES

1. Jerry Seinfeld, *SeinLanguage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), p. 35 (italics added).
2. Gregory W. Lester, *Personality Disorders in Social Work and Healthcare* (Denver: Healthcare Education Seminars, 1999), p. 17.
3. Jerry Seinfeld, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Michael Richards, and Jason Alexander, *SeinOff: The Final Days of Seinfeld* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1998), p. 15.

CHAPTER 8

The Twelve Officials

The Family Within

I have head, hands, feet

—they do the job,

Who the hell am I to choose?¹

—*Zorba the Greek*

The system of energy relationships known as the Twelve Officials is another model, reaching back to antiquity, which is used to organize the full spectrum of human experience. In contrast to the reductionist approach of Western biomedicine, which studies the smallest measurable variable in order to conform to double-blind experiments, Chinese medicine always seeks the broadest possible understanding. The model of the Twelve Officials is no exception, offering an expanded view of anatomy and physiology that takes us beyond fixed somatic structures. Each *official* is much more than just a corresponding physical organ and includes, in addition, a meridian that is a specific pathway of *ch'i* within the body, as well as a *dynamic functional activity* that takes place on all levels.

In the earliest descriptions of the activities of the *body/mind/spirit* found in *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, the functions necessary for health are compared to the organization of the imperial government. Based on the Confucian model for running the empire, each of these officials is likened to one of the ministers that

carries out a specific task, together allowing for the proper balance of the whole. The Heart, in this system, can be considered the Emperor or Supreme Controller, the part of ourselves that rules from the center, providing a sense of order; the Lung's job is that of the Prime Minister who counsels on spiritual matters; the Stomach is called "the Official of the Public Granaries"; etc. As we have already seen, each of the officials can best be understood as arising out of its particular element, a natural expression of that phase in the cycle. Working together in a complementary fashion for the well-being of the individual, these twelve energetic entities are indeed a "family within." Like the ministers of an empire, the Twelve Officials must function smoothly for there to be harmony in the realm (Figure 11).

THE LIVER AND GALL BLADDER

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Liver

Let's begin our exploration of this model with the Liver official, referred to in the classics as "the Military Leader who Excels in Strategic Planning." We can see why this minister belongs in the Wood element, as the qualities of discipline, focus, structure, and vision that are required for running an army are also needed to make growth possible. Interestingly, Chinese medicine is fully consistent with the scientific view of the liver organ as a biochemical factory that produces the molecules necessary for much of the physical function of the organism. The physiology of the liver demonstrates that it provides the *plan* for the enzymes, blood-clotting factors, and the building blocks of metabolism. The concept of the Liver official, however, incorporates this role and then expands it to a more wholistic perspective, looking at planning on all levels.

The importance of this minister is particularly evident in regard to the immune system. The task of warding off infectious agents that

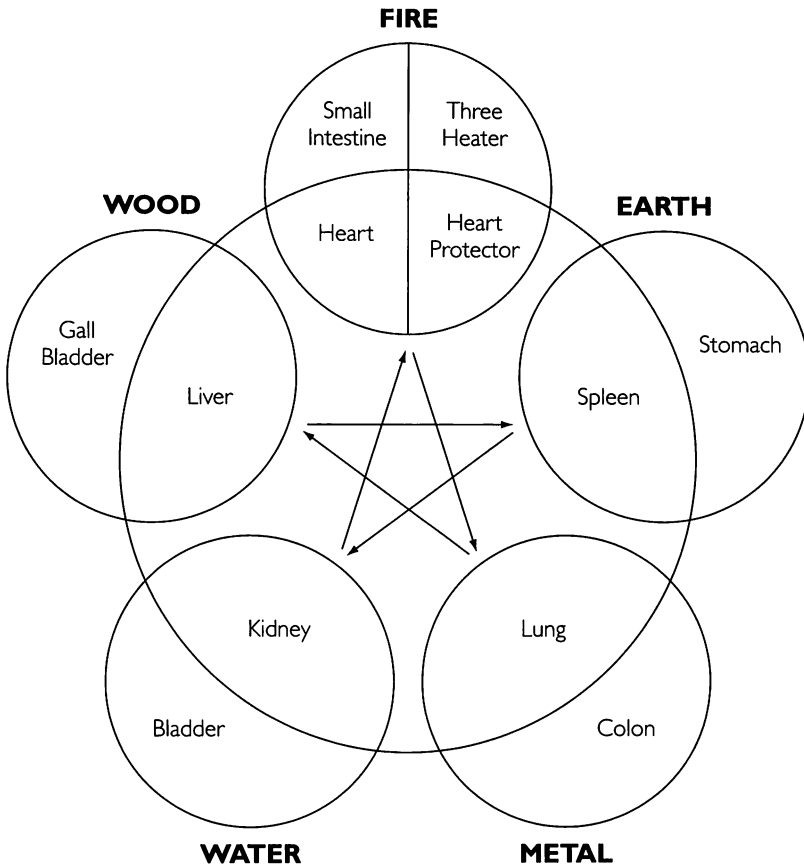


Figure 11. The Family of the Officials

would attack the body suggests the image of a Warrior, whose job it is to defend the boundaries of the empire. Without an adequate plan, the immune system would be ineffective, unable to resist potential invaders. This is quite commonly the explanation when a person suffers from recurrent infections. On the other hand, when the primary symptom is allergies or hay fever, the immune system is essentially attacking the wrong enemy, generating antibodies against pollens, poison oak resin, and other proteins that are, in fact,

harmless. Here, it is as if the Liver official is an overly zealous military leader, going to war because fighting is the only response she knows.² In the case of autoimmune disease, such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, the immune system can be seen to be a hyper-vigilant Warrior who actually turns against her own side, creating an inflammatory reaction within the body's tissues.

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Gall Bladder

The Gall Bladder is described as “the Official of Upright Judgment and Decision-making.” This function is responsible for the countless internal decisions within the body, as well as the decisions necessary for dealing with the outside world. We can see how this minister is fundamental to the growth of Wood. For instance, the decisions to embark on a course of study, move to a different town, or end a relationship that isn't working all allow for the new beginnings that are an inextricable expression of this element. What if this official is not doing his job?

CASE HISTORY: A patient came in for acupuncture and, in the course of a Five Element evaluation, I asked for his favorite color (strong preferences or dislikes frequently point toward an element out of balance). His reply was something like: “Let's see, I think my favorite color is green, no I think yellow. No, no, that was last year. . . . Now I really enjoy red—or is it orange?” Here I was, ready to go to lunch, as he went on and on. The tension and anger I was feeling in my own body at the time was the best indication that a distressed Wood element was underlying his response. Imagine the frustration he must experience trying to decide what shirt to wear in the morning! While I may have been intent on coming up with an answer to put on the page, the process of how he was responding revealed far more about his energy than whatever the final choice happened to be. The lesson here is to assess the energy, in this example the process of decision-making (or lack thereof), rather than the content. The acupuncture point *Bright and*

Clear (Gall Bladder 37), which supports clarity of thinking, turned out to be a useful treatment for this individual's imbalance.

Conversely, what about the person who is constantly making decisions for everybody, trying to control every situation, striving for perfection? We can interpret this pattern as the official of decision-making functioning on full automatic. Though judging of everyone else, these people are usually hardest on themselves. The tendency to make excessive judgments produces a rigidity that is reminiscent of a tree that is unable to bend in the wind and eventually gets blown over. The classic condition that occurs with this particular disharmony is a migraine headache, which typically runs along the Gall Bladder meridian on the side of the head and is often coupled with visual changes and sensitivity to the wind³ (both of which are associated with the Wood element).

Within the scope of an overactive Gall Bladder official we can consider issues around “the inner critic.” A major obstacle to freely expressing what needs to come forth, this “judging voice” can indeed stifle creativity. Since, for most of us, the goal in art or writing is not about perfection, the task for the would-be artist is to extricate herself from this harsh judge within. Ironically, when critical thinking goes to the extreme it immobilizes us in much the same way that indecision does. The modern American poet Robert Bly advises his students to write a poem every day. When asked how this is possible, his answer is simply, “Lower your standards.” The struggle with this critical voice is so universal that in Tibetan Buddhism we find a meditation entitled “chase the judging one.” This is a practice that exposes the part of the psyche for which the whole world would never be enough to render satisfaction.

In the realm of self-growth, bringing the dark areas that need improvement into the light is a crucial first step toward change. Yet,

when a person judges herself for having negative qualities, it is disempowering and blocks the ability to make other choices. The challenge, from the perspective of the Wood element, is to hold the parts of ourselves we dislike with awareness, not with anger. To do battle with these *shadow* aspects only lends them power. The key to effective intervention is to be able to observe behavior from some more centered, compassionate place. To this end, Buddhism teaches the practice of *mindfulness*, which can be defined as awareness without judgment. Of course, we each still need to make the distinctions that allow us to *see* the right path (remember that vision is associated with the Wood element). A more balanced expression of the Gall Bladder official could be understood as discrimination, essential for the healthy decision-making that permits a person to evolve and change.

A cardinal principle is that the officials within an element need to be in communication for optimum health. For growth to take place, the Gall Bladder and Liver officials must work together in harmony. If there were a decision for action but no effective plan, then nothing could be carried through to completion. A plan without a decision would mean that nothing is ever initiated. The chronic marijuana smoker who is filled with creative visions that are the direct result of stimulation of the Liver official by cannabis, yet is unable to turn these dreams into reality, typifies the latter situation.

In fact, drugs, alcohol, and medications are known to have a strong influence on the Liver from both the Western and Eastern perspectives. Whereas biomedicine might measure elevations in hepatic enzymes as an indicator of a problem involving the liver organ, Five Element practitioners look for signs of an energetic disturbance, such as the shouting voice and the emotion of anger that can be observed in some people following excessive alcohol intake. Since the substance itself impairs the function of these two officials, causing faulty decision-making and planning that results in

repeated bad choices, it is easy to slip into a negative cycle with drugs that leads to continued abuse.

THE HEART, SMALL INTESTINE, THREE HEATER, AND HEART PROTECTOR

Fire, the essence of life, is the only element to have four officials. The Heart is known in Chinese medicine as the Supreme Controller and can be understood as the Emperor within, bringing calmness and order to the realm. In the ancient texts, this official is termed “the minister of the monarch who excels through insight and understanding.” It is said, “If the emperor is on the throne facing south (the direction of Fire), then the world is in order,” implying that the sovereign operates from *wu wei* (non-doing). This higher self does not need to *do* anything; through simply staying open and holding the center while maintaining compassion for all of her subjects, the other officials are encouraged to act from their own nature. This purpose is regarded with such reverence that in Japanese acupuncture the Heart meridian is not treated at all. In the Chinese tradition, this official is addressed for anxiety, panic, chaos, insomnia, and stuttering—symptoms that indicate a loss of inner calm. An imbalance in this function may also be expressed in an excessive need to control. Just as the true Sovereign doesn’t rule from the ego but by the will of heaven, this energy likewise needs to be in touch with her universal origins. Treating the first point along the pathway, *the Ultimate Source* (Heart 1), is a way to facilitate this connection.



CASE HISTORY: A middle-aged man came in seeking acupuncture treatment for a benign but persistent cardiac arrhythmia that was triggered by the death of his father. In addition to an irregular heartbeat, the loss

reactivated long-buried problems with anxiety and insomnia. In addition to the emotional trauma, this event had forced upon him the legal problems of managing his father's estate, creating a sense of chaos in his life. These presenting problems, it turned out, were an opportunity to deal with an unresolved wound. The patient's story revealed that his parents had divorced when he was quite young and, raised primarily by a mother who was herself quite overwhelmed, he never had a model in the home to support the development of a calm center. (Of course, the potential for this energy is present in both men and women and, had either parent been more in touch with the quality of calmness, this might not have been an issue.)

Looking at this situation energetically, the man desperately needed to develop a relationship with his Heart official, which had been damaged in the course of his upbringing. In addition to acupuncture and herbs, the key to healing turned out to be a daily discipline of meditation. Through the practice of sitting in the center of his world, and focusing on abdominal breathing (without doing anything), he began to cultivate a feeling of order. Once he could access his own inner Supreme Controller, he was able to make peace with the fact that this energy was absent during his childhood, and the physical symptoms began to abate.

小
腸

Small Intestine

As a minister alongside the Heart, the Small Intestine separates out the substances that need to be retained from the rubbish that is to be discarded, providing the pure environment that befits the lord of the realm. *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* states that the Small Intestine is "trusted with riches and creates changes in physical substance." As we can see from his role in the digestion of food, this task is involved with the transformation of matter. Life itself is a transformative process involving a biochemical fire, and in Chinese medicine the purity of the vital *ch'i* depends on this official.

Once again, we can take the function of an organ in Western biomedicine, where the small intestine absorbs the usable food for assimilation by the body and passes the rest on to the colon to be eliminated, and expand it to a more wholistic perspective. Thus, the Small Intestine official is understood to sort the pure from the impure in all of life experience. On the physical level, a problem in this minister may lead to the retention of toxins, and any disease that involves infection, discharge, or inflammation (especially along the corresponding meridian pathway in the arm, shoulder, neck, and face) may originate here.

The process of sorting is indispensable in navigating one's path in life, as it provides the ability to separate what is truly nourishing from the garbage. We can appreciate the value of letting go for healthy change to occur yet, since the Colon only eliminates what the Small Intestine brings to him, the work of this official is often the first step in any life passage. It has been said that modern Western culture is the most overstimulated society the world has ever seen. Given the endless bombardment of information, much of it useless, the function of the Small Intestine is necessary for maintaining mental and emotional well-being. This is the minister that brings the clarity of Fire and, without his presence, there is pollution of the mind that can result in confusion, depression, resignation, and lethargy.

The Small Intestine is known as the *alchemist*, whose participation is essential for transformation to occur on the deepest level of our being. In essence, spiritual development can be seen as a process of sorting that allows us to continually reach more refined states. Wherever people are concerned with the human potential for increased consciousness, Fire imagery is sure to abound that reflects the function of this official. Psychotherapists, for example, are aware of the fact that patients need to “cook” while in therapy, if

meaningful change is to take place. Jungians, in particular, speak of bringing the shadow into the light of awareness, a phrase that indicates how Fire allows for clear perception. The ancient art of alchemy, where the goal of turning base metal into gold is really pointing to the internal task of refining inferior qualities in order to find the purity of enlightenment, draws heavily upon this minister. And it is no accident that the alchemists, pioneers of the inner frontier, “prayed for a hot fire.” When Rumi advises us to “burn inside that presence,”⁴ he is calling upon the work of the Small Intestine official, the symbol of “the Fire of transformation.”

三
焦

Three Heater

The Three Heater has a critical role in the balance and distribution of warmth throughout the individual. The image of *three* refers to the three *burning spaces* of the chest, upper abdomen, and pelvic region, and this minister acts as a thermostat in the crucial task of regulating temperature. As the controller of heat, this function provides a comfortable environment so that all the other officials can do their work in proper fashion. In Chinese medicine, the Three Heater is called “the minister of waterways for warmth and connections” and has a special role in integrating all areas of the body.

We think of this official whenever a person complains of internal extremes of hot and cold. A disturbance can manifest in complaints of being chilled to the bone and unable to get warm or, conversely, burning up with fevers and hot flashes. Extremities that are icy cold may be a symptom of an imbalance here, as can be problems of sexual frigidity and impotence, especially if associated with coldness in the lower abdomen upon palpation. On an interpersonal level, the job of the Three Heater facilitates warmth and connection in relationships. The process of reaching out, communicating, and making contact is very much the external reflection of an official who has been called “the perfect host.” Sometimes a problem here originates

from extreme exposures to temperature or from a history of moving suddenly from the arctic region to the tropics, or vice versa. Basically, this is the minister that bathes all of the officials in the appropriate amount of Fire, allowing for their harmonious function.

The final Fire official is the Heart Protector, sometimes referred to as the Circulation-Sex function, “the official of the center, who guides the subjects in their joys and pleasures.” More than any other minister, she is the one essential for healthy relationships, which derives from her task of creating a shield around the Heart. As we have seen, the inner Emperor needs to rule from compassion and, in order to remain open in this way, is the only official to have another just to protect it. The Heart Protector corresponds in the physical body to the pericardium, the envelope that surrounds the organ of the heart.

It is in the emotional realm that we can truly appreciate the value of this official. In modern Western culture we seem to have the idea that people ought to stay wide open in relationships at all times, and that it is wrong to ever close down. A wonderful ideal perhaps, but an attitude that can be terribly naive and, especially when others are hurtful or thoughtless, one that can wreak havoc on our well-being. Even in the most intimate of connections, there needs to be a boundary, as it is simply not possible or even desirable to merge with another. The Beatles may have said, “All you need is love,” but it took Robert Bly to add, “All you need is love—and a bullet-proof vest.” The role of the Heart Protector is to keep us from being unduly vulnerable and sensitive by providing a buffer to the hurts in human relationships. This official allows a person to set limits and do whatever is needed for emotional protection. Without this function in place, an individual can be easily wounded, damaged by even imagined slights, let alone by real rejection. The result is to be forever

心

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Heart Protector

bouncing around, as the Heart official can then be bruised right to the core. Paul Simon captures this all-too-common state of heart-break in his song “Graceland”:

There’s a girl in New York City, who calls herself a human trampoline.
 Sometimes when I’m falling, flying, tumbling, in turmoil
 I say, whoa, so this is what she means.
 She means we’re bouncing into Graceland.
 And I see, losing love is like a window in your heart,
 Everybody sees you’re blown apart,
 Everybody sees the wind blow. . . .⁵

On the other hand, it is quite typical, especially after suffering a personal loss, for a person to build a brick wall around himself—an image that reflects a Heart Protector that is too rigid and closed off. This certainly accomplishes the protective work of this minister, but at the cost of keeping out the possibility of love. Again, Paul Simon seems to know this territory well:

They got a wall in China, it’s a thousand miles long,
 To keep out the foreigners they made it strong.
 I have a wall around me that you can’t even see,
 It took a little time to get next to me.⁶

So the ideal, once again, is balance, this time between opening and closing the gates of intimacy. A healthy Heart Protector needs to operate, in fact, as a fluid gate that can let in love where appropriate, but can also shut down to protect oneself when necessary. In this way we can trust that, on the deepest level, we will survive regardless of the outcome of any interaction. This official actually permits us to take the risk of true intimacy, open up sexually, and connect “heart to heart.” Knowing that this minister is in place allows the Heart to stay open and loving in the world of relationships. The universality of the pattern of the Heart Protector is demonstrated by the following passage from the *I Ching* hexagram

for *Inner Truth*, written thousands of years ago and still relevant today:

Here the source of a person's strength lies not in himself but in his relation to other people. No matter how close to them he may be, if his center of gravity depends on them, he is inevitably tossed to and fro between joy and sorrow. Rejoicing to high heaven, then sad unto death—this is the fate of those who depend upon an inner accord with other persons whom they love. Whether this condition is felt to be an affliction or the supreme happiness of love, is left to the subjective verdict of the person concerned.⁷

CASE HISTORY: Over the years, I have treated perhaps a half dozen young girls of elementary school age, who came to my practice with a variety of conditions ranging from stomach pains to headaches. What was common to all of them was that the complaints only occurred on school days, often necessitating absence from class. On exploring their situation, I found each one to be shy and highly sensitive to comments by others. Once it became known that they were vulnerable in this way, these girls became the targets for the bullies in the schoolyard. Unable to protect themselves, they would be devastated by these hurtful attacks, and their symptoms became the only way to avoid the emotional pain.

During our acupuncture sessions, I told them about the Heart Protector as an ally that was already present inside, and treated a point on the pathway, the *Inner Frontier Gate* (Heart Protector 6), that embodies the essence of this function. I asked them to go home and draw a picture of this image, how it looks when the gate is open and when it is closed tight. As the girls became more familiar with this internal energy, they were better able to call upon it when appropriate. If a bully approached in the schoolyard, they learned how to close their internal gate and protect themselves. Eventually, they no longer were so vulnerable and the bullies turned their attention elsewhere. The ailments

cleared once their conditions were addressed energetically, though I often thought that it was the bullies that really should have been in treatment. Again, a symptomatic approach in these cases, even with natural methods such as herbs, would have missed the *energy* of the situation and failed to correct the source of the problem.

In summary, we can describe four distinct expressions of the energy of Fire as it manifests at the level of the officials. There is the *kingly* essence of Fire, the center and connection to the Source, where the spirit of heaven (*shen*) resides. This is the Heart official. The clarity of Fire that allows things to be seen in the light of awareness, so critical for transformation, is the work of the Small Intestine minister. In the function of the Three Heater we have the warmth and glow of Fire, and its ability to reach out and make connections. Lastly, the Heart Protector official provides the protective aspect of Fire, the boundary that is required for relationships to be healthy.

THE STOMACH AND SPLEEN



Stomach

The element of Earth is the source of nourishment, and within it we find the Stomach and Spleen officials. The Stomach is the organ of transformation of energy, the Mother whose role it is to feed the person in all ways. This official is considered “the place of rotting and ripening,” the compost bin where food begins to be broken down for digestion. The job of this minister can be likened to a cement mixer. On the physical level, this function involves bringing food down and mixing it with digestive juices, a process that is essential for replenishing the stores of energy in the body. Conditions that may occur from an imbalance here include nausea and vomiting, bloat-

ing, gastritis, reflux esophagitis, malnutrition, obesity, chronic fatigue, and even epilepsy (reflecting a loss of the stability of Earth).

On every level, this minister brings things to fruition through providing the ability to reap a harvest. In the realm of the mind, the Stomach official permits the ripening of ideas, which also need to be churned over and broken down so that the kernels of truth inside can be uncovered. Excessive activity could create the rumination and obsessive thinking that can be characteristic of an Earth element out of balance. On the spirit level, a lack of being nurtured can rob a person of life energy and lead to insecurity and a feeling of desperation. The Stomach supports the *ch'i* that is derived from food and, as a result, is necessary for maintaining the vitality of all aspects of the organism.

The Spleen is the official of transport. She can be compared to “a fleet of lorries that distributes and delivers goods and services throughout the country.”⁸ As an embodiment of the Earth element, this minister is primarily concerned with the distribution of nourishment. Connecting all the parts of the whole, the Spleen provides grounding and center. When there are multiple symptoms, congestion from lack of movement, dullness and swelling (as in edema), or when the extremities seem cut off (as in peripheral neuropathies and circulatory problems such as Reynaud’s phenomenon and varicose veins), we think of her role.

In Chinese medicine, the pancreas (since it is in anatomic proximity to the spleen organ and regulates blood sugar) is considered to be part of the Spleen official. Diabetes, which is a failure of the pancreas to produce insulin, can be associated with an imbalance here. It is worth noting that the most serious long-term complications of this disease relate to circulation, particularly involving the small arteries in the retina, kidneys, and feet, an observation that is quite consistent with the Chinese view of this minister as responsible for distributing

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Spleen

nutrients. Just as the Stomach brings things down, the Spleen holds them up. When she is not functioning well it can be reflected in diarrhea, hemorrhaging, or prolapse of an organ. As might be deduced from observing Earth energy in nature, the Spleen is integral to the process of reproduction in women. The organ of the uterus is literally the soil where the fetus is planted and is governed by this energy. Menstrual disorders, including irregularities and bleeding problems, and many other gynecological conditions are typically treated through this official. The nurturing connection that is the work of the Spleen minister creates a home and a sense of place, qualities fundamental to the Earth element.

THE COLON AND LUNG

大腸

Colon

The task of the Metal element in providing meaning and spirit depends upon the Colon and Lung officials. Referred to in the classics as “the Drainer of the Dregs,” we know that the colon organ is responsible for the elimination of undigestible food and the waste products from digestion. This is “the garbage collector,” removing the filth in order to allow for something new to come in. On the physical level, an imbalance in the Colon official might involve constipation or diarrhea, colitis, or, interpreting this function in a broader context, the retention of impurities anywhere in the body. In particular, toxins in the skin (which is associated with Metal), or infection in the sinuses (where the Colon meridian travels), are common manifestations of a problem in this minister.

When we consider the Colon within the model of the Twelve Officials, we are, of course, speaking of letting go on every level, of whatever no longer serves us. Thus, on the mental level his role is to allow us to let go of negative thinking, toxic experiences, and all the

old programs that keep us stuck in destructive patterns. Indeed, constipation of the mind can be far more damaging than it is in the body. On several occasions, I have had patients actually state, “My head is a giant cesspool,” a *golden key* that indicates a problem in this official. On the emotional level, it is important to let go and release the range of feelings that arise in the course of living: anger, joy, sympathy, grief, and fear. In Chinese medicine, these are all considered normal expressions and certainly can be appropriate; they do not become unhealthy as long as the Colon enables their elimination, permitting a person to move on. So much of the spiritual path involves quieting the mind and giving up ego attachments, a process that relies intimately on this minister. To experience a reverence for the sacred, it is essential to stay uncluttered—truly, if we can stay empty, the spirit is already ours.

The function of the Colon cannot be separated from the quality symbolized by Metal, since holding on to negativity would inevitably contaminate our sense of worth, rob us of meaning, and lower self-esteem. When we sense that someone is “full of shit,” it may be an indication that there is an imbalance here. In many wholistic medical approaches, before energy can be strengthened, the initial intervention is often the cleansing of toxins. This means supporting the minister that can be called “the Great Eliminator.” In fact, we find that just about any change that eventuates in a genuine movement toward health first requires the release of old patterns of behavior, a reflection of the work of the Colon official.

肺
Lung

The Lung is “the Receiver of the Breaths of Heaven.” In the texts from ancient China we find her role elucidated:

The Lung is the official of receiving pure *ch’i* from the Heavens. The Lung holds a privileged place along with the Heart. The Lung, which is just next to the Heart, is the Minister and Chancellor. As a minister he would confer with the prince—mutual exchanges side by side, with the hierarchy preserved.”⁹

The Emperor certainly rules from the Fire element, yet “the Prime Minister,” as a principal component of Metal, provides wisdom and spirit. On the body level, the organ of the lungs brings in oxygen, and asthma, a condition that involves constriction of the bronchial tubes, is the classic disease state that reflects a problem in this official. Any respiratory difficulty or susceptibility to infections (*wei ch’i*, the protective energy, depends on this minister) may, in fact, stem from a Lung imbalance. In addition, the skin is considered “the third lung” (since it breathes) and inflammations such as eczema are often related to this function.

Again, the Lung official is more than a physical organ, and her job is called upon in order to receive on every level of experience. In the mental realm, this might mean taking in positive feedback and recognition. Not being comfortable with acknowledgement could obviously contribute to the low self-esteem characteristic of a Metal imbalance. On the spirit level, we find it common to so many traditions throughout the world to emphasize breathing practices as a way to contact what is essential and revitalize the deepest part of our being. Through the rhythm of the breath we can cultivate quality and find inspiration. It is clear why Chinese medicine treats the Colon and Lungs together, as the two officials within Metal must mutually support each other in the dance of letting go and receiving throughout the *body/mind/spirit*. The interplay of these two functions is succinctly expressed in this esoteric teaching from the *Tao Teh Ching*:

Bend and you will be whole.
 Curl and you will be straight.
Keep empty and you will be filled.
 Grow old and you will be renewed.
 Have little and you will gain.
 Have much and you will be confused.¹⁰

THE BLADDER AND KIDNEY

The final element to be considered, Water, is the home of the Bladder and Kidney officials. The Bladder is the reservoir that stores the riches of one's energy reserves. It is quite common, in our fast-paced world, to find people "running on empty," a description that aptly conveys a depletion in this function. When he is out of balance, individuals report that they are either drowning or drying up. The feeling of being overwhelmed that is characteristic of this situation contributes to the fear that is associated with Water. The use of caffeine provides only temporary support and, in the long run, further strains a struggling Water element, aggravating the problem. Clearly, the best solution is to set a limit on activities and find the time to rest. Very often, in advising patients of the value of slowing down, I share the image from nature of the wintertime rains putting fluid back in the reservoirs. We need to have something in reserve if life is to have the adaptability, flexibility, and power that is reminiscent of the flow of water in nature.

The Bladder meridian contains more acupuncture points than any other in the body. Originating with *Eyes Bright* (Bladder 1) at the medial corner of the eye, this pathway runs over the top of the head to the occiput, then down the back alongside the spine, through the sacrum and the posterior surface of the legs, ending at the little toe. The last point, *Extremity of Yin* (Bladder 67), is the one that has been shown in Western medical studies to successfully turn breech presentations in pregnancy. On the physical level, headaches, neck stiffness, low back pain, and sciatica can all stem from a disturbance in this minister.

True to its role as part of the Water element, the Kidney official contains the seed and is seen as the root of both *yin* and *yang*. This is the controller of the balance of fluids, known as "the official who

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Bladder

肾

Kidney

does energetic work and excels through ability and cleverness.” She is regarded as a deep generator of power, and the *jing* is stored here. This vital-essence can be compared to the genetic substrate that sets the range for what is possible. Constitutional and inherited disorders, which are understood in Chinese medicine to be a disturbance in *jing*, are generally addressed through the Kidney energy. Though the uterus is associated with the Earth element, the process of reproduction, as well as hormonal and sexual secretions, is governed by Water. Consider, for instance, the way the fetus floats in amniotic fluid. Consequently, treatments for infertility, impotence, and vaginal infections often center on this function.

The minister of the Kidney is essentially a source of vitality for our lives. We have seen this idea expressed through the Five Element model in the observation that winter holds the potential for the full expression in summer. In a similar way, the Fire energy for relationship and connection, so intertwined with the Heart Protector and Three Heater, has its origin in the Kidney official.¹¹ Since she is associated with the lower orifices, sexuality is rooted here. Obviously, the Fire element is intimately involved in the passion of sexuality, but the source of libido energy is understood to rest in the Kidney.

In Chinese thought we inherit a fixed amount of *jing* (essence) for our life that, in a physical way, is contained in sexual secretions. This is the theoretical basis for Taoist yogic practices that involve refraining from ejaculation and orgasm during the sexual act. Instead of spilling one’s *essence* and depleting reserves, the goal is to use the energy engendered by intercourse to feed the higher centers. Similar to the Tantric tradition from India that teaches the importance of raising the *kundalini*, the primal Water energies are contained by stopping in time. Both partners then breathe deeply,

using *yi* (intention) to bring the powerful vibrations up the spine, thereby nourishing the upper *chakras*.¹²

The Kidney pathway begins on the sole of the feet with the *Bubbling Spring* (Kidney 1). This is the eternal source of Water within and, like its image in nature, provides purity and freshness. In Chinese medicine, treatment of this point is especially rejuvenating and cleansing and is useful whenever there is stagnation on any level. Legend has it that, in ancient days, soldiers in China would needle themselves here to overcome fear as they went into battle. The meridian of the Kidney, being associated with a *yin* official, runs along the front of the body (the *yin* side), in contrast to the Bladder, which runs up the back (*yang* side). On the lower abdomen, there is a point, *the Door of Infants* (Kidney 13), that is used to treat infertility. The chest points on the Kidney pathway provide some of the most powerful ways to address the spirit level in all of acupuncture. *The Spirit Seal* (Kidney 23) represents the unique stamp of a person's spirit, an image that derives from the family seal used on documents in Chinese tradition. This point offers access to the *ancestral ch'i*, expressing the specialness of a particular heritage and the wisdom of the ancestors. *The Spirit Storehouse* (Kidney 25) is a reservoir of strength that is considered a resource for bringing constancy to life. It represents the deep place inside that remains steady and undisturbed, despite the vicissitudes of external fortune. Five Element practitioners find this point a valuable ally in dealing with the fears that so commonly arise when a patient is dealing with serious illness.

The following diagram, again borrowing the metaphor of the administration of the political and social structure, summarizes the vital role played by each of the officials, who together allow for the healthy workings of the whole human being (Figure 12).

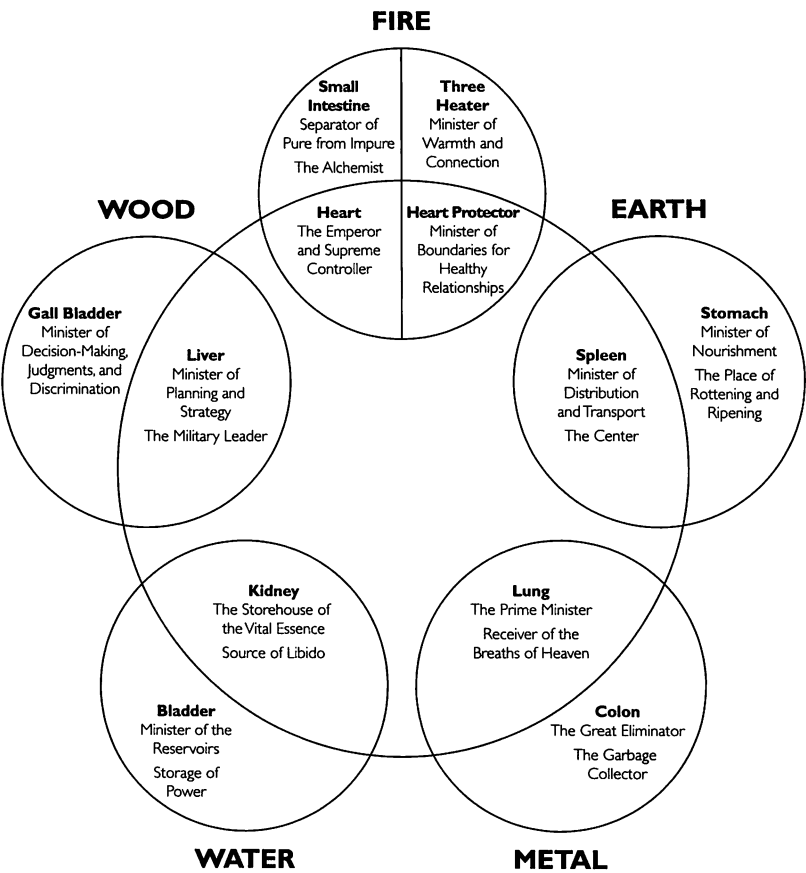


Figure 12. Ministers of the Empire

THE CHINESE CLOCK

Though the family of the officials has been presented in this chapter as an extension of the Five Element system, there exists another arrangement that is commonly used in Chinese medicine, derived from the anatomical order of the meridian flow in the body. In this format, we have a different sequence that allows us to assign one particular energy to each of twelve two-hour periods. This becomes

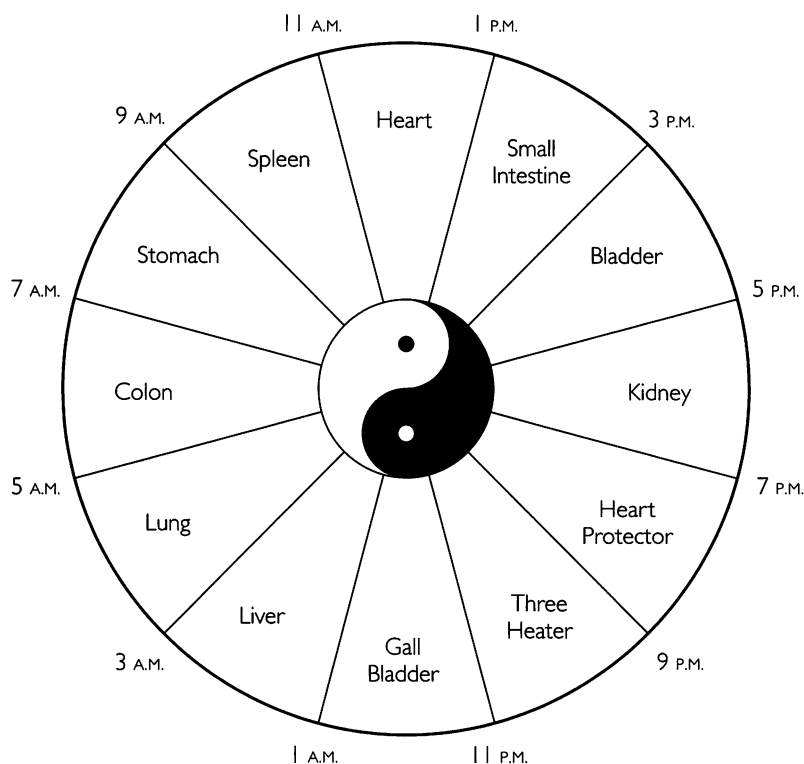


Figure 13. The Chinese Clock

the basis for *the Chinese Clock*, a model that delineates the time of day when each official is at peak function. According to this view, the time of the Heart official begins at 11 A.M., the Small Intestine at 1 P.M., the Bladder at 3 P.M., the Kidney at 5 P.M., the Heart Protector at 7 P.M., the Three Heater at 9 P.M., the Gall Bladder at 11 P.M., the Liver at 1 A.M., the Lung at 3 A.M., the Colon at 5 A.M., the Stomach at 7 A.M., and the Spleen official at 9 A.M. (Figure 13).

This organization can be used to make sense out of many common observations. It is known, for example, that the greatest frequency of heart attacks occurs at either 11 A.M.–1 P.M., when the

Heart official is at maximum activity, or between 11 P.M.–1 A.M., when it is at its lowest ebb. If a person has an excess of energy in this minister they may be more vulnerable at the first time, while if they suffer from a deficiency they may be more prone to problems at the latter. Many people experience low energy from 3 P.M. to 7 P.M., when it is the peak time of the Bladder and Kidney; the need for rest may simply be more pronounced during the period of the Water officials. The fact that the evening, between 7 P.M. and 11 P.M., brings the function of the Heart Protector and Three Heater to the fore, suggests that this is the time to cultivate relationships and human interaction. Then there are individuals who report that they find themselves up, doing their best decision-making and planning from 11 P.M. to 3 A.M., the time when the Gall Bladder and Liver are working to the fullest. Actually, the teaching contained in this association is that these tasks are meant to be performed while we sleep, free of the interference of the rational mind. The saying from Russian fairy tales that “Mornings are wiser than evenings,”¹³ reflects the universal experience of sleeping on a problem and, having processed the information unconsciously through the Wood officials, waking with a clear direction.

Also explained by the Chinese Clock is the observation that those struggling with grief and loss seem to find themselves awake at Lung time, between 3 A.M.–5 A.M. How many of us can relate to the very human ordeal, captured so well by Rilke, of “wandering pathless at night in the mountain range of his feelings”?¹⁴ Meditation, which is practice in emptying the mind, traditionally takes place between 5 A.M.–7 A.M. This certainly is no accident, since this is the period of letting go, when the Colon is at its peak activity. The early morning is also meant for having a bowel movement, and allowing time for this process during these hours can go a long way to cure constipation. Finally, we observe that the officials involved with digestion, the

Stomach and Spleen, are at the height of their function between 7 A.M. and 11 A.M., suggesting that this is the ideal time to eat the largest meal of the day. In violation of this natural pattern, many people typically take in the most food in the evening, at the opposite time of the clock, when these officials are ready to rest. The analogy may be drawn to the importance of putting fuel in the car at the start of the trip, not at the end of the journey.

There is indeed much wisdom in the Chinese Clock for living our lives in harmony with nature's rhythms. In addition, from a diagnostic standpoint when a symptom recurs at a particular time of day, it may be pointing to an imbalance in the official that is at peak activity during this period.



One of the most outstanding and unique features in the practice of Five Element acupuncture is the ability to relate to the family of the officials as living presences within the individual. Through taking the twelve Chinese pulses (each of which corresponds to one of the officials), combined with cultivating an intuitive sense, students in this system learn to communicate directly with these internal realities, deciphering their needs. The health of the patient is understood to be a reflection of the sum total of the officials, and the job of the acupuncturist is to use needles to support their optimum function. Many observers have noted the parallels to Shamanism,¹⁵ where it is the role of the shaman to contact spiritual entities not ordinarily available to the uninitiated, and then to intervene in this realm with the goal of relieving suffering. Indeed, more than in any other respect, it is the development of a personal relationship with the officials that enables practitioners of this tradition to touch the

essence of the patient, thereby bringing the spirit realm alive in the treatment room.

Each of these ministers has a song to sing, and the particular expression of a human life may be seen as arising out of a unique “symphony of the officials.”¹⁶ In the next chapter, we will examine the remarkable similarity that exists between the model of the officials from ancient times and Jung’s concept of the archetypes, as it is applied today in modern depth psychology. As has been apparent throughout this book, one of the most useful ways to understand the concepts of Chinese medicine is as archetypal symbols that allow us to describe what ultimately must remain a mystery, the energies of life. It is the genius of Chinese medicine to be able to assess the state of the vital force through careful observation, to formulate a diagnosis in terms of universal models, and then to intervene creatively by treating a specific energy for the purpose of restoring balance. The model of the Twelve Officials, who perform their functions within the framework of the Five Elements, serves as a guide for all of these endeavors.

NOTES

1. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Zorba the Greek*, screenplay by Michael Cacoyannis (New York: 20th Century Fox, 1965).
2. The similarity between Five Element acupuncture and Jungian archetypal psychology is nowhere more evident than in the inclination of both systems to personify the internal energies. The practitioner and the patient then deal with these aspects as living entities that have a life of their own. In this spirit, I have elected to use gender pronouns (rather than “it”) when referring to the officials. For consistency, I have used the feminine form for the *yin* officials on the inside of the circle of the elements (known in Traditional Chinese Medicine as the *tsang* organs) and the masculine form for the *yang* officials on the outside (the *fu* organs).

3. A medical study from Canada demonstrated that migraine sufferers could actually predict the velocity of the wind, based on the severity of their headaches.
4. Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), p. 62.
5. Paul Simon, "Graceland," on *Graceland* (Indianapolis: Warner Bros. Records, 1986).
6. Paul Simon, "Something So Right," on *Greatest Hits, Etc.* (New York: Columbia Records, 1977).
7. *I Ching*, Bollingen Series, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), Hexagram 61, *Inner Truth*, p. 238.
8. Professor J. R. Worsley, Lectures at College of Traditional Chinese Acupuncture, Leamington Spa, England, 1978.
9. *Huang Ti Nei Ching Su Wen* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1955), Chapter 8.
10. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, trans. John Wu (New York: St. John's University Press, 1961), ch.22, p. 29 (*italics added*).
11. In the system of acupuncture known as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the fact that the Kidney is the root of *yin* and *yang* bestows upon her special significance. This minister is seen to govern both Water and Fire in the body. The function that regulates fluids is considered the *yin* aspect and is associated with the organ of the kidneys. Libido and vitality are referred to as Kidney-*yang* and are seen to reside in the adrenals. Since this physically adjoining organ secretes both adrenalin and cortisol, critical stimulating hormones, this model compares nicely with the Western view. Instead of the emphasis on the role of the Fire officials in relationships and sexual expression that we find in Five Element theory, practitioners of TCM tend to address problems in this arena with acupuncture points and herbs that support the Kidney.

In this medical tradition based on polar complements, the depletion in reserves (*yin*), so ubiquitous in our culture, creates a relative excess of *yang* that is observed in the overstimulation, insomnia, and restlessness that patients present with in the treatment room. This pattern would be considered in biomedicine to be an anxiety disorder involving an overload of adrenalin, a diagnosis that fits the Chinese concept of a dysfunction in Kidney-*yang*. As caffeine consumption to overcome the associated exhaustion pushes the adrenals to work even harder, it ends up aggravating the imbalance.

12. For a detailed description of Taoist sexual yoga practices, see *Awaken Healing Energy Through the Tao* by Mantak Chia (New York: Aurora Press, 1983).
13. Robert Chandler, trans., "Vasilisa the Beautiful," in *Russian Folk Tales* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 1980), p. 64.
14. Rainer Maria Rilke, "We Must Die Because We Have Known Them," in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 139.
15. Peter Eckman exhaustively traces the shamanistic roots of the Five Element system as taught by Professor Worsley in his book, *In the Footsteps of the Yellow Emperor*. Likewise, Ted Kaptchuk, whose book, *The Web That Has No Weaver*, was a milestone for introducing Chinese medicine into the West, has referred to J. R. Worsley as the greatest shaman he has ever observed.
16. Gary Klapman, *Conversations on the nature of the officials*, San Francisco, February, 2001.

CHAPTER 9

Archetypes of the Unconscious and Chinese Medicine

A Jungian Perspective

For the god wants to know himself in you.¹

—Rilke

Carl Jung's vision of the psyche was vast indeed. Perhaps his single greatest contribution was uncovering inner archetypal images that have a life of their own. Residing within the collective unconscious, these universal patterns are part of the inherited structure of the psyche, independent of conscious will. Though we may often be unaware of their existence, our thoughts, feelings, and actions are, to a great extent, determined by these "living presences within." Jung knew the psyche to be real and that "we are not the only master in the house."²

It was, in fact, Jung's awareness of the existence of these archetypes that compelled him to reject Freud's more narrow view of the unconscious. After his break from orthodoxy, he spent the next three years in intense introspective exploration, establishing an intimate relationship with these internal forces and creating the foundation for his entire psy-

chology. Central to Jung's thinking was the concept of *individuation*, the maturation process that allows us to draw upon the full range of archetypal potentials in order to become the unique individual that is our destiny. He stood in wonder at the depths of the world within.

Joseph Campbell furthered Jung's discoveries when he brought to the West an appreciation of the role of myth as a way that cultures traditionally accessed the archetypes. Campbell essentially approached these primal images, which can be found in the stories that originate in all times and places, as energetic resources for the human condition. This understanding is reflected in his following statements:

Mythology helps you to identify the mysteries of the energies pouring through you.³

[Mythology can be defined as] the flight of the imagination, inspired by the energies of the body.⁴

Neurophysiological research supports the observation that the development of the brain allows for the activation of these potentials over time. The archetypes are actually built into our nervous system and, in essence, we are "hard-wired" for them. In order to participate in the full range of expression as we go through life, we need to be able to draw upon these internal energies. To the student of Chinese medicine, this explanation brings to mind the basic teaching that, underlying the health of a person, is the *ch'i*. The Five Elements and the Twelve Officials, the models we use to describe the energetic processes, are symbols based on universal archetypal images, which is why they are as meaningful for us today as they were in ancient times. The corresponding meridian pathway for each official is the acupuncture equivalent to the Jungian concept of the "hard-wiring." Both the Western and Eastern approaches share a common viewpoint: our behavior is seen to be the sum total of these inner functions, we need all of them working together har-

moniously for there to be health, and the role of treatment is to bring these powerful forces into balance.

From the time of the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece to the present, a great many systems have evolved for organizing the world of the archetypes. The contemporary Jungian psychologist Robert Moore has developed a map of the fundamental structure of the psyche, based on four primary energies.⁵ In his descriptions of the King, the Warrior, the Lover, and the Magician, we have a picture of the innermost regions of the collective unconscious. I have taken the liberty to add the Queen archetype, thereby expanding the discussion to create a model of *five*. This archetypal construct reflects the wholeness of the human condition, while fitting well with the Five Elements of Chinese medicine as used in this book.⁶ As we explore this “inner geography,” comparisons with the elements and officials literally jump out at us (Figure 14).

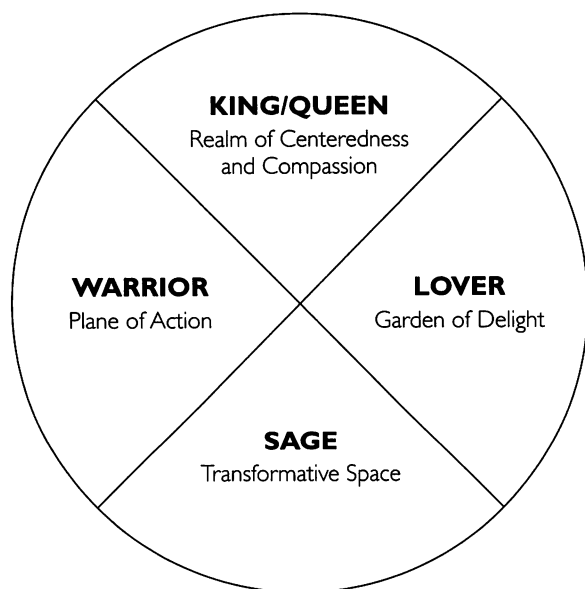


Figure 14. The Structure of the Deep Psyche

THE WARRIOR: DEFENDER OF THE BOUNDARIES

The archetype of the Warrior is found around the world, symbolizing the virtues of commitment, focus, and sacrifice. Like an effective general, this image embodies the planning and decision-making that are needed to successfully defend the boundaries of the realm. She is a resource that provides the skill and strength required to deal effectively with any struggle.⁷ Basic to this energy is the observation that the true Warrior is loyal to the Sovereign and can endure all kinds of pain in service of a higher purpose. The Samurai tradition of Japan, as well as the Knights of the Roundtable, offers magnificent examples of this archetype. If we wish to accomplish any demanding task, we too need to call upon the inner Warrior for the discipline to persevere, especially when the going gets rough.

From the perspective of the Five Element model, these descriptions of the Warrior place this archetype clearly within the energy of Wood. The strength contained here is analogous to the power of the Wood element for creativity and action. The greater purpose of the Warrior brings to mind the vision that is associated with this element. In the system of the officials, we would more specifically equate this archetype with the Liver, “the Military Leader who Excels in Strategic Planning.” The relationship of this minister to the immune system, charged with the responsibility for defending the boundaries of the physical body, illustrates how well the image of the Warrior fits Chinese medicine’s understanding of the function of the Liver official.

A distortion of this archetype, which is unfortunately all too prevalent in the world today (and encouraged through images on television and cinema and by the availability of guns), is the person who is wantonly violent. The true Warrior’s concern is to get the job done, and she would prefer to use the least amount of force necessary for this end. Another “shadow” expression of this archetype is

the mercenary who only asks, What's in it for me? A modern-day example is the individual who focuses a large amount of energy on a task, but does so solely for personal gain. Instead of being out for herself, the healthy expression of the Warrior always serves a transpersonal commitment.

We can begin to appreciate that within our contact with the archetypes lies a very real danger. These are powerful images of perfection, containing truly numinous energies. Any one of these internal structures can totally engulf us. When we are in contact with them it feels like

The awesome trees, the distances I had felt
so deeply that I could touch them, meadows in spring:
all wonders that had ever seized my heart.⁸

Each archetype wants all of us, and there is the distinct possibility of being possessed by them, with the consequent loss of our individuality. The goal, instead, from the perspective of individuation, is to access whichever archetype is appropriate in the moment, but to avoid being taken over by it. The workaholic who only knows how to stay busy and productive and is unable to relax is certainly operating under the image of the Warrior, but is an example of the one-sidedness that is bound to result when a single energy dominates our personality. When in the extreme, this situation can be addressed in Oriental medicine through releasing the seven dragons to counteract the demons of possession. (See chapter 3, "Ancient Chinese Wisdom," page 54.)

THE LOVER: APPRECIATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

The next archetype to be explored is the Lover, a very different kind of energy. In place of the Warrior's focus on struggle, we are now in

the garden of delight, where there is the opportunity to be “erotic with the senses.” When this energy is constellated there is joy, relatedness, sensuality, passion, and what has been called “appreciative consciousness.” The ability to be content with how things are and hold an attitude of gratefulness comes from this archetype. Many people suffer in their relationships by carrying their Warrior energy (so necessary for dealing with the tasks of everyday life) into the bedroom. The outcome is then at best a business partnership, and quite often a fight, though, in truth, both partners probably only really want love. Once these distinctions in the energies are understood, it is possible to consciously access the Lover when appropriate. There is no better way than through poetry:

An orange on the table, your dress on the rug
—And you in my bed.
Sweet present of the present,
Cool of night, warmth of my life.⁹

When looked at through Five Element eyes, this is Fire energy. In particular, we can see the close association of the Lover with the Heart Protector, the official so necessary for healthy relationships, “who guides the subjects in their joys and pleasures.” Also corresponding to this archetype is the Three Heater official, responsible for warmth and connection. Being able to incorporate both the Chinese and Jungian models can be useful in the treatment room, as a case from my practice illustrates.

CASE HISTORY: A sixty-year-old woman came in suffering from an autoimmune disorder (a condition which suggests that she was at war with herself). The history uncovered that she had been sad and depressed ever since the death of her adult daughter five years earlier. The daughter had been this woman’s primary source of joy, and this emotion was now completely unavailable in her life. In fact, the

loss was so terribly painful that the patient couldn't even bear to recall the daughter's memory or mention her name, therefore never processing her grief. In Jungian terms, the daughter carried the Lover archetype for her mother and, for healing to take place, the woman had to learn how to access this energy for herself.

After several acupuncture treatments focusing on the Heart Protector and Three Heater pathways, the mother reported a dream. In it the daughter returned, bringing with her laughter—and the patient actually woke up laughing! Since images in dreams can best be understood as aspects of our own inner world, the unconscious was suggesting a way to heal the wound. As the daughter was no longer available to carry the Lover energy for her, the woman had no choice but to find these qualities within herself. In place of the futile attempt to forget her daughter, the task was now to *be* her. Once this split-off energy began to be integrated, it became possible to address the unexpressed grief, and the next step in the course of acupuncture was to treat the Colon meridian in order to support the function of letting go. At the following visit, the patient reported that she had gone out and bought flowers, bringing them into her home for the first time in years. It was a definite sign that her capacity for joy was now returning. Through the process of working with the Five Element energies and archetypal images together, the woman learned the wisdom, expressed so concisely by the poet Rilke, that "What seems so far from you is most your own."¹⁰

There is a vital distinction here between inner and outer experience that is essential to the individuation process. Often our first contact with the archetypes is in *projected* form; another person holds the energy for us. This is so often the case in romantic love, where we feel the Lover embodied concretely in "the other." The inevitable fall from bliss, as we discover a real human being with faults and limitations, asks us to reclaim these archetypes as our own. It is a process

that also holds the potential to discover what it means to truly love another, despite the imperfections of the human condition. This is not a simple task, and for many it is more appealing to keep seeking new relationships. As the poet Robert Bly has observed, “It is easier to marry these qualities than to develop them ourselves.”¹¹

In order to find a healthy, balanced expression, there needs to be a harmonious blend between the archetypes. For the Warrior, the task is to *do*, while the Lover is content to enjoy life and simply *be*. A person who has Warrior energy without the Lover will be a workaholic and find no time for relating or for joy. On the other hand, a Lover without the presence of a Warrior will certainly not accomplish very much. In the realm of relationships, he will lack appropriate boundaries. From the vantage point of pure Lover energy, “If you can’t be with the one you love, love the one you’re with.”¹² Aphrodite, after all, is totally promiscuous with whoever happens to come along. For there to be fidelity and commitment in any area of life, the Warrior is required. Clearly, we need to be able to draw upon both archetypal expressions. As Rumi suggests,

The day is for work. The night for love.¹³

THE KING: CENTER OF CALMNESS

Moving on in our journey through the inner terrain, we have in the archetype of the King an image that appears everywhere as a symbol of centeredness and order. “The Divine King” is the representative of heaven on earth, connecting the realm to a transcendent purpose. This archetype personifies the life principle and, when the just King is on the throne, ruling by heaven’s blessing, all things flourish.¹⁴ The positive expression of this energy takes delight in the work of others, bestowing blessings on his subjects and fostering cre-

ativity. Within our own world, each of us needs to be able to call upon this potential to stay calm and feel that our domain is in order. When we can access the inner King, there is a sense of peace and purpose in our work. Essentially, we all need to be Sovereigns for our individual kingdoms.¹⁵

The ancient Chinese also understood that men and women each contain an inner Emperor, and they called this energy the Heart official. When healthy, this Supreme Controller, by its very being, allows calmness to prevail in all of the other officials. Just as the Emperor was the embodiment of heaven's will, so the Heart is where the *shen* (heavenly spirit) resides. *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* tells us that "the Heart is the essence of life," a parallel to the vital role of the King as the source of fertility for the realm. It is obvious that the Heart official in the Chinese understanding represents the same internal energy that Jungians refer to as the King archetype.

In applying the archetypal model to clinical conditions, Jungians look for "bipolar dysfunctions," an approach that is reminiscent of the excess or deficiency that we diagnose in Chinese medicine. If a person is cut off from the King within, typically through ineffectual or absent parenting during childhood that impaired the natural development of this potential, there is likely to be chaos and loss of center. The result can be anxiety, panic disorders, or compulsive behavior throughout life, which can be seen as a vain attempt to establish order. We can understand the dependent personality type in this context as arising when an individual is unable to find the King inside and projects it onto another. In the Five Element system, all of these conditions can be addressed through tonifying the Heart meridian. As I needle acupuncture points along this pathway, I will frequently say, "This treatment is now putting the Sovereign back on the throne," sharing an image of the archetype that reinforces the intention of the therapy.

When the inner King is wounded, which may occur from growing up with an abusive parent, the imbalance is often expressed in a destructive way. In the family, the tyrannical father who is castrating to his children is driven by such a negative manifestation. When in a position of power, the “shadow” form of this archetype, rather than encouraging and supporting others, will tend to exploit the realm for personal gain. Instead of admiring those around him, he wants to be admired. This behavior is a temptation for all of us and, sadly, we see far more expressions of this kind than we do evidence of the good King in the world today.¹⁶

People who become possessed by this archetype will generally operate by their own rules, without regard for the pain that may be inflicted on others. They are, in fact, saying, “I am the King.” Psychologists will typically diagnose them as having narcissistic and sociopathic personality disorders. As we approach these conditions through acupuncture, we may find an excess of energy in the Heart official, and sedation of points on this meridian is then indicated. Thus, we can seek to influence the archetypes in much the same way as we do the officials in Chinese medicine. If we are too much in the power of any one image, it is certain to become unhealthy and needs to be toned down. On the other hand, if a particular energy is unavailable or deficient, we need to find ways to enhance that potential. The goal, as always, is to find balance.

THE QUEEN: THE GREAT MOTHER

The archetype of the Queen represents the Goddess on earth, the deep mysterious feminine. Cross-cultural images are very helpful here: Kuan Yin for the Chinese, Tara from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Shechyna as the Sabbath Queen in Judaism, and Mary in Christianity. Her appearance may vary, but the depth of compassion

and ability to nurture are the same around the world. Everywhere, this energy of infinite mercy is intimately connected to healing. Nature in all her radiance, which is the presence of the Divine spirit in the world, is the ultimate manifestation of this archetype. The Queen is, in essence, the Great Mother who cares for us all.

The feminine aspect of the Sovereign holds a genuine concern for the least fortunate of her subjects. Mother Theresa certainly operated from this energy. There is a story that, while she was bathing the sores of a leper on the streets of Calcutta, a reporter commented, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." Mother Theresa's reply was simply, "Neither would I." She was doing it, rather, as an expression of the Queen archetype.

In elemental terms, this can only be Earth. The support, abundance, and nourishment that are the gifts of this element are also the qualities we associate with the good Queen. In the same way that the Earth provides for her children, this archetype is the symbol of nurturing the generations to come. As an example, in Iroquois tribal meetings there was always an elder woman who held this energy for the community. Her role was to bring in the perspective of how any decision would affect the great-grandchildren, down to the seventh generation. Imagine if the qualities of the Queen could be applied to the contemporary dialogue concerning the impact of development and globalization on the environment.

As with each of the inner images there is a shadow side, and this is manifested in a mother who, feeling threatened by her child, turns vicious. This figure is found throughout fairy tales in the character of the wicked stepmother intent on destroying her children. It is the personification of the negative part of ourselves that can become rigid and paranoid, opposing anything that is new and different. The story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is the classic portrayal of this dark aspect, embodied in the jealous queen who feeds Snow White the poison apple.

To draw upon the positive side of the Queen, on the other hand, provides the faith that permits us to trust whatever life has in store. It is the inner resource that instills the ability to accept what we cannot change, the quality of receptivity that is essential in dealing, for instance, with any chronic illness. Ultimately, this archetype allows surrender, which is the way faith finds its expression. Only when a person is able to rest in the Queen energy, can he truly “let it be.” As the Beatles remind us,

Let it be. Let it be.
 Mother Mary close to me.
 Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.¹⁷

THE SAGE: ARCHETYPE OF AWARENESS

The final archetype we will discuss is the Magician, or Sage. Jung had a deep connection with this internal reality and knew him as Philemon, the wise old man. In his autobiography, Jung describes long conversations with this energetic presence.¹⁸ This is the archetype of awareness, the master of esoteric knowledge. The Sage can be called “the steward of sacred space,” guiding the processes that bring in the spirit and dealing with realms of which most people are unaware. Again, we often first awaken to this possibility through a projection onto another—in this case, the guru. The task of individuation then requires finding the wisdom that this person represents on the inside, through uncovering one’s own inner Sage.

Considering this archetype through the Chinese model, we recognize the energy of Metal, especially the Lung official. This is the minister who receives pure *ch’i* from the heavens, an identical function to the Sage’s task of tending sacred space. The close relationship, described in the previous chapter, between the Lung (Prime

Minister) and the Heart (Emperor) reminds us of the archetypal connection of the Sage and King. This pattern occurs widely in myths, as in the legend of Merlin and Arthur, and a natural balance exists between these two images. Whereas the King comes from compassion in dealing with his subjects, the Sage operates from wisdom. Wisdom without compassion can be cold and unfeeling, while compassion without wisdom runs the risk of becoming co-dependent in an unhealthy process. Therefore, each needs the other. In dealing with the abusive Kings we meet in the world who would rob us of power, the Sage, by bringing in awareness, helps maintain the self-esteem that is a quality associated with Metal.

Practitioners of the healing arts operate to a great extent under the Sage archetype. In this capacity, special skill and wisdom are called upon to direct the process of transformation. This function is analogous to the role of the shaman in tribal cultures, who performed the rituals that were vital to the well-being of the community. Through contact with the Divine, meaning was restored to the life of the people. Similarly, when the health care provider is able to attend to the inner energies of the client, the spirit becomes present. In fact, the treatment room is one of the few places in our modern world where sacred space can still be found; and, in Jung's view, true healing only takes place through contact with the numinous.

In channeling these archetypes, we once again run the risk of identifying with them. The statement, "I am the healer," is a sure sign of such an inflation, and possibly of possession by the Sage. Again, whenever any of these images are used for personal gain or power, we are witnessing a shadow expression. If the practitioner is attached to the role of "healer," the client is relegated to the role of the sick, dependent patient. Only by being cognizant of the dangers inherent in the process can we support a genuine transformation in others. When the provider of health care is able to accept her own

wholeness, which includes the wounded parts of herself, she is then in a position to accomplish the true goal of treatment, which is to assist the individual who is ill in activating her own inner healer.



Comparisons of models are never exact, yet our tour of the inner archetypal world demonstrates the same principles as the Law of the Five Elements. The correspondences of the Warrior with Wood, the Lover with the Heart Protector and Three Heater side of Fire, the King with the Heart official, the Queen with the Earth element, and the Sage with Metal are all strikingly apparent. The Water element, associated as it is with stillness and the deep ocean of the unconscious, represents another aspect of the Sage. As the source of vitality, Water can also be seen to relate to the Lover archetype, and this is consistent with the way this element is linked to the emotions in Western astrology.

In another juxtaposition, the four archetypes in Moore's original system can be related to the four officials of the Fire element. Here, the King is the Heart; the Magician corresponds to the minister of the Small Intestine (the alchemist concerned with transformation); the Lover compares to the Three Heater function (responsible for warmth and connection); and the Warrior can be likened to the Heart Protector official (the defender of boundaries in our interactions with others). It is illuminating to explore these rich relationships between models, as each sheds light on the other.

Being able to bridge the Jungian map of the psyche with the energy medicine of China, while mutually supportive, has practical significance as well. Through the archetypal system, we have a way to describe the essence of acupuncture—balancing the energy of the elements and officials—in symbols rooted in Western culture.

This provides a way to communicate more effectively to those schooled in science what Chinese medicine is all about. The archetypes basically give the elements a human face, which, in working with clients, makes healing images available that are both meaningful and accessible. In addition, many followers of Eastern spiritual traditions, even after years of meditation practice, find themselves unable to express the full range of their potential. The preeminent method of Jungian psychology, known as *active imagination*, seeks to develop a relationship with the spectrum of internal energies and, in a very real way, is a “practical spirituality.”¹⁹ Drawing upon the fairy tales and myths we heard in childhood, the archetypal approach to personal growth speaks in a universal language that is readily understood by people everywhere.

Conversely, the wisdom of ancient China, itself a philosophy built on archetypes, is so inviting and touches us so profoundly because its concepts originate from an intimate connection with the natural world. In working with clients, the tools of Chinese medicine provide a way to address disturbances in the archetypes and to intervene in an efficacious way to bring these primal aspects into balance. The Chinese characters that depict the acupuncture points evoke pictures that are part of our potential as human beings. Points such as *the Meeting of One Hundred Ancestors* (Governor Vessel 20), *the Spirit Storehouse* (Kidney 25), *the Great Eliminator* (Colon 4), and *the Inner Frontier Gate* (Heart Protector 6), are examples of archetypal images within the body that can be used to support the smooth flow of *ch'i*. Through treatment of the energetic reflection of the archetypes that are accessible through the meridians, acupuncture allows us to influence the patterns underlying symptoms that may manifest on any level of the *body/mind/spirit*. Just as the path of life must unfold both within and without, so we find that both Eastern and Western traditions offer powerful symbols that can be allies along the way.

Jung was once quoted as saying, "I'd rather be whole than good." The individuation process is, indeed, a journey toward wholeness. The goal is to be able to call upon the various archetypes within the unconscious as resources for a full life: "Whether we develop and evolve, or stay stuck in repeating immature, destructive patterns, depends on our relationship to these inner images."²⁰ As long as we can avoid being taken over by any one of them, we can remain true to our unique self and integrate an ever-wider range of expression into our behavior. This again reminds us of how we approach the energies in Chinese medicine, where a sense of inclusiveness is fundamental.

The archetypes need us—without our lives they are two-dimensional; and we need the archetypes—they are a tremendous source of energy for us to draw upon. It is the task of the ego, in this Jungian model of the psyche, to serve as a mediator that can access these inner potentials where appropriate.²¹ According to Jung, the purpose of human existence, in essence, is to bring more and more of the dark unconscious into the light of conscious awareness. From the Chinese view, this merging of *yin* and *yang* puts us in the *Tao*, bringing unity and harmony to life.

Richard Wilhelm, who helped bring Eastern philosophy to the West through his definitive translation of the *I Ching*, originally travelled to China as a Christian missionary. He later said that his greatest accomplishment was that he never converted a single Chinese. Instead, he himself was converted. Wilhelm was a friend of Jung's and, in 1928, brought him a copy of a meditation text that he had translated, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. This was at a time when Jung's exploration of the unconscious had left him cut off from the psychoanalytic community in Europe and generally isolated. It is said that Jung devoured the manuscript overnight, finding in it an uncanny similarity to his own ideas about the

individuation process. From this alchemical treatise, Jung received confirmation that his discoveries were not merely relevant to himself, but were, in fact, universal. This eventually led to a decision to share his realizations with the world. The connection between the archetypal model and ancient Chinese wisdom, which we have explored in this chapter, was historically instrumental to Jung's own evolution. Wilhelm knew that this relationship was by no means accidental and offered the following explanation:

Independently of one another, the Chinese sages and Dr. Jung have plumbed the depths of the human collective psyche and have there encountered living elements that are so similar because in fact they actually exist. That would prove that the truth can be reached from any direction, provided one digs deep enough, and the correspondences in thought between the Swiss researcher and the old Chinese wise men would then only demonstrate that both are right because they have both found the truth.²²

NOTES

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, "As Once the Winged Energy of Delight," in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 261.
2. C. G. Jung, "Commentary," in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, trans. Richard Wilhelm (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1962), p. 113.
3. Joseph Campbell, *A Joseph Campbell Companion: Reflections on the Art of Living*, ed. Diane K. Osborn (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 40.
4. Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988).
5. Drawing upon Jungian psychology, cultural anthropology, comparative theology, and expressions in contemporary society, Dr. Moore has written and lectured extensively on the archetypes of the unconscious. He brings a clarity and consciousness to his presentations that truly brings these energies alive. Many of his ideas have been influential in

my thinking and can be found in his book, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover* (Harper San Francisco, 1990).

6. Robert Moore describes a foundational four-fold structure to the deepest levels of the unconscious, with a quadrant for the Warrior, Lover, Sovereign, and Sage, respectively. As mythology is full of both masculine and feminine images for each archetype, eight possible expressions, in fact, exist. The King and Queen, presented separately in this chapter, are two aspects of the Sovereign energy.
7. In Western culture, it has been traditional to consider the Warrior archetype only in its masculine form (and thereby more readily available to men), and the Lover archetype as primarily feminine (and the province of women). This bias is reflected, for instance, in John Gray's, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992). Implied in this understanding is that a woman needs to access her inner masculine if she is to find Warrior energy, and that a man needs his inner feminine in order to be a Lover.
It is important to see how these attitudes are culturally determined and limit our vision of what it means to be a complete man or woman. A more liberated stance would see women as containing the Warrior as a natural expression of the feminine, and to that end it is useful to find images of strong "women warriors" to model this energy. In a similar way, the Lover is accessible to men within their inner masculine as part of the wholeness of the psyche. In order to expand the way we think of these archetypes, I have elected to employ the feminine pronouns when speaking in general of the Warrior and the masculine pronouns when referring to the Lover.
8. Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Sonnets to Orpheus," in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, p. 229.
9. Jacques Prevert, "Alicante," in *Paroles* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1949).
10. Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Sonnets to Orpheus," in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, p. 249.
11. Robert Bly, Men's Conference, San Francisco, 1989.
12. Stephen Stills, "Love the One You're With," on *Stephen Stills* (New York: Atlantic Recording Corp., 1970).
13. Rumi, *We are Three*, trans. Coleman Barks (Georgia: Maypop Books, 1987), p. 56.
14. The idea that the King is to rule through "heaven's blessing" is crucial to the healthy expression of this archetype. One of the most insidious aspects of George W. Bush's ascendancy to power in 2000 is the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court blocked the recount of votes. Through circumventing the will of the people (the equivalent in a democracy

- to the Divine Will) and allowing partisan politics to determine who won the election, Bush essentially stole the throne. With origins of his presidency that are consistent with the image of “the Shadow King,” we find, true to this archetype, environmental degradation, war, and famine (unemployment) in the land. (See Disney’s *Lion King* for a vivid portrayal of the widespread devastation that occurs when the tyrant gains control.)
15. In the Jungian model, women contain within the unconscious all of the masculine archetypes existing in their *animus* (the inner masculine), and therefore certainly have access to King energy. Men, likewise, have all of the feminine archetypes available within their *anima* (the inner feminine) and can, as a result, develop a relationship to the inner Queen. Though the same gender archetypes are generally seen to be closer to conscious awareness, both men and women can draw upon the full range of human expression.
 16. The concept of “the Shadow King” provides an archetypal analysis of the motives behind patriarchy and the abuse of power, so rampant throughout history. Being aware that humans also have the potential to access the positive form of the King archetype offers some hope in addressing the roots of a ubiquitous problem that threatens us all.
 17. The Beatles, “Let it Be,” on *Let it Be* (New York: Apple Records, 1970).
 18. For an enlightening introduction to Jung’s life and psychology, I highly recommend his autobiographical work, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, which Jung completed just days before his death.
 19. There is a plethora of popular Jungian books that describe in detail *active imagination*, a process that allows direct communication with the inner archetypes. In particular, the works of John A. Sanford and Robert A. Johnson provide valuable resources for the general public.
 20. Phil Wagner, Late night conversations after watching *Seinfeld*, 1996.
 21. Wayne Souza reminds me that the archetypes are living personalities, and there is no certainty they can be accessed at will. Perhaps all we can do is create an environment that makes them welcome; whether these energies choose to appear is not in our power. That is why the alchemists of old always added the statement *Deo consente* (God willing) to their spiritual practices. Similarly, in the treatment room practitioners may be able to open potentials within their clients; whether healing occurs is best left to the destiny of the patient—and to the great Mystery.
 22. C. G. Jung, *Word and Image*, Bollingen Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). p. 94.

CHAPTER 10

Seasons of Our Lives

Sheng Cycle *Transformations Over Time*

For every thing there is a season,
and a time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to break down and a time to build up;
A time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance. . . .
A time to love and a time to hate,
a time of war and a time of peace.¹

—*Ecclesiastes*

As we have seen, the Law of the Five Elements is a model that allows us to describe the dynamic movement fundamental to life. Having evolved in ancient China through observation of the patterns in nature, the seasonal rhythm of the year became a way to grasp the stages in the vital energies. Five distinct symbols capture the predominant qualities in the natural world as we move through the sun's annual journey. In this chapter, we will apply this system to other periods of time—in particular, the seasons of a person's lifetime.

The Five Elements can, in fact, be extrapolated to any recurrent cycle that has an alternating movement between expansion and

contraction. For example, the elements deepen our understanding of the energy of a day. In this analogy, the new beginnings of the morning are represented by Wood; the fullness at noon is symbolized by the Fire element; the afternoon with its decrease in light and harvest of one's efforts relates to Earth; the reflective time of evening when there is a quieting of activity and an opportunity for quality corresponds to the Metal element; and the rest of night is reminiscent of Water. The Five Elements can also provide insight into a cycle as short as one breath, where there is a rising of the energy with inhalation (Wood and Fire), and a falling in exhalation (Earth and Metal). Water, the image of stillness and rest, can be seen as the pause between the breaths. Each element leads to the next one according to their *sheng* or creative-cycle connections.

相 生 序

The Creative
Cycle

In a similar fashion, the elements can enhance our appreciation of larger cycles of time. Nowhere is this model more relevant than in approaching the stages of human life, offering a description of the changing energetic patterns that occur as we move through a progression of experiences. As we confront the unique challenges inherent in each phase, awareness of the transformations in the energy enables us to respond more effectively. Following the progression of the elements can help us avoid the difficulties that would inevitably arise from relying on guidelines not appropriate to the season in which we find ourselves. If, as the ancient Chinese asserted, the way to stay healthy is to live in harmony with nature, then the Five Elements, by providing a map for the journey, helps us navigate the shifting landscape.

There are numerous constructs for organizing the stages of life. For example, Hindu tradition describes four distinct periods: the student years, the family and householder time, life in the ashram, and the return to the forest. In elemental terms, these would correspond to Wood, Fire and Earth, Metal, and Water, respectively. For our purposes, relating the course of a human life to the seasons of the year allows us to readily draw insights into the Five Elements. A sim-

ple system that I have found useful equates seven years of life with each month in the annual cycle.² If we consider birth to take place at the winter solstice (the turning point when the light returns), this would place age 21 at three months into the new year, on the spring equinox of March 21st, and clearly within the Wood element. According to this analogy, 42 years of age takes us to the summer solstice and the full expression of the Fire time. Having reached the zenith in the movement, the expansion is now complete, and the energy begins to contract as we enter mid-life. At 56 a person would come to August 21st in the yearly rhythm and the late summer harvest of Earth. Continuing this comparison, age 63 corresponds with the autumnal equinox of September 21st and the beginning of the Metal phase. And, 77 years of age marks the last month of the year, the time of rest that is associated with the Water element. Though there is never a perfect fit, this scheme does provide a practical way to apply the Five Element model to the seasons of our lives.

THE WOOD STAGE OF LIFE: CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Oh and springtime would hold it—, everywhere it would echo
the song of annunciation. First the small
questioning notes intensified all around
by the sheltering silence of a pure, affirmative day.
Then up the stairs, up the stairway of calls, to the dreamed-of
temple of the future—; and then the trill, like a fountain
which, in its rising jet, already anticipates its fall
in a game of promises. . . .³

—*Rilke*

The spring of life, like the spring in the yearly rhythm, brings with it new possibilities and growth. Wood is the symbol for the energy associated with this season in the cycle of the elements. At this time, when nature gives birth to countless beginnings, the potential

contained in the seed becomes manifest. As humans share in the elements of the natural world, we also have the opportunity to experience the tremendous vitality that comes with this rising movement. One only has to recall the boundless enthusiasm of the teen years, surging outward in wild unpredictable ways, to appreciate the essence of the Wood stage of life. The older person is only too glad to have this intensity over and prays that these expressions of the younger generation do not become destructive; by contrast, for the child and youth this “bursting forth” is the driving force, and there is nothing to do but to play it out.

For someone in this expansive phase, the dominant themes include birth, growth, and creativity. This is a period that holds the adventure of travelling different paths and freely exploring myriad forms of expression—planting seeds that can grow over time. We wouldn’t expect from this energy a certainty as to the ultimate outcome. The hope, however, would be for enough clarity to allow the movement to reflect an inner truth, in the same way that the growth of an oak tree depends upon the plan contained in the acorn. Once again, the issue of balance is critical. As a person seeks to discover her purpose in the Wood years, the freedom to change direction needs to exist alongside the ability to stay focused long enough to adequately test any given vision.

It is apparent that the qualities represented by the Warrior archetype, which we have associated with the Wood element, are requisite to meeting the demands presented by the springtime of life. During the span in which an individual faces the daunting task of finding her identity, the commitment, discipline, and skill of the Warrior allows an inner potential to be realized. Young people have an instinctual need to express this image; as part of the collective unconscious it is built into the structure of the psyche. In cultures that are more in touch with the natural energies of life, initiation into the Warrior at this stage was commonly provided through rituals and

ceremonies conducted by the elders of the tribe. If a healthy direction is not offered the archetype will still manifest, but is then likely to find destructive forms, such as membership in a gang. In our Western world, sports can provide a positive initiation into what it means to be a Warrior. The martial arts, where a skill is practiced within a spiritual tradition, furnish a time-honored way to develop a transpersonal context for this archetype. Although avenues into the realm of the Warrior have in the past been more available for boys, shifts in societal values now rightly support girls, as well, in developing this human potential.

Particularly relevant to the Wood phase is a quality that Zen Buddhists refer to as *the beginner's mind*.⁴ Characterized by a willingness to stay in the question, it is a fundamental ingredient if a person is to remain vibrant. This attitude stands in contradistinction to the expert's mind, which, in its certainty at having the answers, reminds us of the rigid tree that will not survive the windstorm. The openness of a beginner's mind is valuable at every turn, but is most called for in this early period. There is nothing more upsetting than someone with limited experience who claims to be certain of the truth. Wood energy is intimately connected to coming forth into life, and this quality of flexibility allows the youth to stay open to the full range of possible expressions.

Behavior that would be out of place later in life, for instance someone in her fifties still struggling to find out who she is and the work she is meant to do, might be quite appropriate in the season of Wood. It is an inescapable condition of human existence that an older person needs to come to terms with limitations and accept the reality that we do not get to live out every latent dream. In contrast, it is a mistake for a young person to have limits that are set too narrowly. What a loss it is when an individual becomes so pragmatic that she gives up her idealism too soon, closing the door to the wide spectrum of potential experiences that exist for her life. In the time of youth it is impera-

tive to hold on to a sense of imagination and a vision of new possibilities; indeed, the future of the world depends upon it.

CASE HISTORY: I treated a young man in his mid-twenties for incapacitating migraine headaches. Six years earlier, he had joined an ashram in order to devote himself to intense spiritual practice. At the time we first met, he had taken an Indian name and was meditating five hours a day. As I looked at my chart of the Five Elements I wondered whether, in a sense, he was violating the laws of nature. It seemed that he had moved abruptly from the Wood stage of growth to the Metal phase of cultivating spirit, leaving out significant steps in between. As we explored his situation together, it became clear that, in his commitment to what he considered to be "the right path," he had severely restricted his range of choices. Essentially, this patient was filled with *unlived life*. Through listening to his dreams and intuitions, he became increasingly aware that there was a work he needed to do, and that his letting go of activity in the world was indeed premature. Ultimately, "he had to be somebody before he could become nobody."¹⁵ In time, he elected to leave the ashram and eventually enrolled in law school, a direction more in tune with the Warrior inside who was shouting for expression. The headaches, which were over the Gall Bladder meridian, "the Official of Upright Judgment and Decision-making," disappeared once he had reached a decision that was more appropriate to his stage of life.

It is important to note that this interpretation does not apply to everyone who joins a monastery, as there certainly are those who seem destined to drop worldly involvement in order to pursue matters of spirit, even at an early age. The goal in this case was simply to find this man's truth, to help him become the unique individual he was meant to be. It is to be hoped that his time in the ashram will serve him on his journey, and that the spiritual qualities he cultivated there will enrich his life's work.

The beginning of any movement sets the direction for what will follow, and the seeds that are planted in the spring will determine the harvest to come. For a young person navigating the Wood phase, the challenge is to grow like the oak tree, according to one's inner law. Through an awareness of the model of the Five Elements, one can emulate the qualities of nature found in the springtime and plant seeds that will endure. The *I Ching* offers this advice in the hexagram *Innocence*, ䷍, composed of the trigrams *Chen*, the Arousing, below and *Ch'ien*, the Creative, above, the symbol for natural movement under heaven:

If one does not count on the harvest while plowing,
Nor on the use of the ground while clearing it,
It furthers one to undertake something.⁶

THE FIRE STAGE OF LIFE: EARLY ADULT YEARS

And still ahead: summer.
Not only all the dawns of summer— . . .
Not only the days, so tender around flowers and above,
around the patterned treetops, so strong, so intense.
Not only the reverence of all these unfolded powers,
not only the pathways, not only the meadows at sunset,
not only, after a late storm, the deep-breathing freshness. . . .
But also the lofty summer nights,
and the stars as well, the stars of the earth. . . .
Look, I was calling for my lover.
But not just she would come
for how could I limit the call once I called it?⁷

—Rilke

Fire, like Wood, is an active, rising energy. In nature, the season of summer represents the time when the plant world reaches its mature expression; the potential that was prefigured in the seed now

becomes manifest. In human life, the associated period of young adulthood asks us to bring forth all that is within. The goal is to come out fully, becoming all that we are capable of, and not hold anything back. Kahlil Gibran implores us to “burn and free yourself, there is no greater joy than Fire,” going on to say,

Life itself is the thing,
not joy or pain or happiness or unhappiness.
Live for yourself—live your life.⁸

We can recognize the *sheng* cycle (the mother-child relationship of the elements) operating, as it is the growth of spring that leads to the full manifestation in summer. Only through meeting the work of the Wood stage, which includes finding a direction and a plan, is the fulfillment of the Fire years possible. In turn, living out the time of Fire will allow an individual to move into the Earth phase that follows and bring forth a harvest.

In the summer of life we come to maturity. This season is a time of great clarity, as we allow ourselves to be seen. During the Fire stage we settle on a career, develop meaningful relationships, and find our expression in the world. The officials of this element play a crucial role in this process. The Three Heater, necessary for the distribution of warmth on all levels, allows a person to reach out and make connections. A healthy Heart Protector provides a buffer against the ups and downs that come with interactions, preventing the isolation and withdrawal that can stem from being too vulnerable. There is a tremendous amount of sorting involved in the process of discovering one's true path, and the Small Intestine guides this function. In the realm of relationships, since we all have our faults, the ability to separate the wheat from the chaff (a process that reflects the work of this minister) is essential if there is to be any hope for long-term survival. And the Heart official, our source of calmness, must provide the center for all of these endeavors.

Within the archetypal model, the Fire element corresponds to the Lover. Including and also extending beyond love of another person, this symbol of appreciation and delight in the senses literally draws us into life. *Eros*, the world of relationships, is the province of the Lover; this includes relationships with other people, with nature, with art and music—and with one's own inner self. The expansion in awareness of the world within, which develops with maturity, is the foundation for self-knowledge and a prerequisite for healthy external connections as well. Only when we are in touch with our own moods and feelings can we have clarity in dealing with others. One special form of the Lover archetype is manifested in an intimate, committed relationship to a single individual. Here, behind “the walled garden” in the realm of Aphrodite, there is the possibility of experiencing a level of communication, sexuality, and deep connection that truly renders the spirit present. In facing the lessons of love, and moving from romance to what it means to really be there for another human being over time, we realize the fulfillment of this stage of life.

The maturation process involves cultivating the expression that is appropriate for a given period, and one of the challenges of the adult years is to learn to access the qualities of the Lover.⁹ We can see how the archetypes are part of “the hard-wiring” in the common phenomenon of the mid-life crisis. If the energy of Fire has been dammed up for too long, as for example in the case of the workaholic, there is the risk that its appearance at this time can be truly overwhelming, erupting like a volcano and destroying structures in its path. Rather than being possessed by a single archetype, the goal is to integrate new energies in a balanced way that builds upon what has come before. As we learn about the archetype of the Lover in the season of the Fire element, it is important that we not lose the boundaries, focus, and commitments of the Warrior that were so integrally related to the purpose of the Wood phase.

In the *I Ching* we find the phrase, “Be not sad, be like the sun at midday,”¹⁰ advice that aptly describes the spirit of the summertime of life. In these years of high activity it is certainly a great loss if a lack of Fire, or an imbalance in one of the officials within this element, leaves a person cut off and unable to express himself. On the other hand, the Fire stage is inherently an intense, busy time, which presents its own potential problems as we explore its territory. People are often swept along in the frenzy of busyness that can be associated with this element, forgetting the value of rest. When we neglect to allow our energies to replenish, a disharmony is created in the body that can result in typical Fire symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, or high blood pressure. Once again, the ideal in Chinese medicine is to find balance.

THE EARTH STAGE OF LIFE: THE HOUSEHOLDER PHASE

Children, one earthly Thing
truly experienced, even once, is enough for a lifetime. . . .
Truly being here is glorious. . . .
For each of you had a time. . . .
When you were granted a sense of being.¹¹

—Rilke

No period in the cycle of the elements can last forever, and so the time of Fire gives way to that of Earth. The energy is beginning to contract and there is now a decrease in the intensity of the light. In the awareness that the expansion of life cannot go on endlessly, we sense the inexorable rhythm of *yin* and *yang*. The tasks of the springtime, the planting of the seeds and subsequent growth, after coming to maturity and full expression in the summer, reaches its natural culmination in the late summer. In this season of nourishment the

fruits and vegetables are ready to be picked; we feel ourselves supported by the abundance of nature. For humans, this stage of life provides a harvest on many different levels.

This is the time to experience the fulfillment of the functions of the elements. Certainly, it can be a great loss when people don't stay grounded in their lives, perhaps switching jobs or relationships too easily, and thereby fail to reap the harvest of what has been sown. And so, we find that a different set of rules apply at this point than were true for the Wood years, when it was vital to explore a number of possible paths. The qualities of stability and containment, basic to the Earth element, are needed in order to meet the challenges inherent in the householder time. As we come to accept the limitations built into the natural cycle, it is helpful to know that we are supported by universal principles.

It is in the phase of the Earth element that the harvest of a career can be realized. We have now developed to the point where we have something of value to share and can contribute to the betterment of the world. If there is a work that needs to happen, this is the right moment to bring forth the fruits of our labor. Life also presents us with an opportunity to assist others, as we find ourselves in a position to mentor those younger than ourselves. It is essential at this stage to share in the abundance of the Earth, which includes participating in the nourishment of those around us.

One of the most important ways the Earth element is expressed in our lives is through raising a family. Again, we can see the *sheng* cycle of the elements operating, as the intimate relationship of the Fire phase has its fulfillment in the Earth stage of nurturing life. Quite literally, we realize the words of the poet Pablo Neruda: "Thanks to our love, . . . the earth will continue to live."¹² At this time we face the demands of parenthood that must be met to help our children flourish and become who they need to be. There is a

strong sense of being an instrument of nature, and we learn, in the most intimate way, about “letting oneself be led” and sacrificing personal needs to forces bigger than ourselves.

As parents, we come to directly experience the teachings found in the *I Ching* hexagram *The Receptive*, ䷁. After their beginnings in the creative movement of heaven, it is this principle of pure *yin*, associated with the image of Earth, that brings material things to completion. The wisdom contained in the symbol of six open lines clearly encourages an attitude of acceptance. For women in particular, there are specific issues involving *the Receptive* that are inescapable during the childbearing years. In so many ways the processes of pregnancy, birthing, and breast-feeding the newborn require that the woman herself embody the qualities of Earth in order to nurture a new being. For the man, the calling of fatherhood asks him to go beyond the controlling male ego and discover a more gentle, caring side, bringing with it the prospect of considerable growth and wholeness.

In the archetypal realm, the energies of the Earth would correspond to the image of the Queen, the embodiment of infinite compassion and understanding. In dealing with the people we meet along the road, the pertinent question for this stage is how to nurture their process and offer our blessing. Through a deepening connection to the Great Mother archetype comes a genuine concern for the suffering of others. This may then manifest in work, a charitable effort, or a kind gesture—but the primary thing is that we now extend our concerns beyond individual issues and find ways to give back to the community. The archetypes are powerful resources, but they depend on how we live to come to expression. Indeed, the Goddess becomes present when we give support to those around us and help them prosper. In the Earth phase, all that has come before can find its culmination, as we reap the fruits of a lifetime and encourage a harvest in the world around us.

THE METAL STAGE OF LIFE: A TIME OF WISDOM

We want to display it, to make it visible,
 though even the most visible happiness
 can't reveal itself to us until we transform it, within.
 Nowhere, Beloved, will world be but within us.
 Our life passes in transformation.
 And the external shrinks into less and less. . . .
 A Thing that was formerly prayed to, worshipped, knelt before—
 just as it is, it passes into the invisible world.
 Many no longer perceive it, yet miss the chance
 to build it inside themselves now, with pillars and statues:
 greater.¹³

—Rilke

In nature, autumn is the time of letting go, as witnessed in the leaves falling from the trees. Having completed the active movements of the cycle, this is the season to quiet down and get in touch with the quality of things. For the human condition, the autumn of our lives represents the opportunity to attain tranquility and peace. Our tasks in the world concluded, we can now withdraw attention from outside involvement and focus on uncovering the meaning to be found within. Again, we see the mother-child progression of the elements operating, as we move from growth, expansion, and harvest to the inner work of cultivating spirit.

Like the autumn leaves, we too must embrace the process of letting go, as we face the limits of life. It is now clear that, even with the best of intentions, there are paths that will not be traveled, dreams that will not be fulfilled. The goal in this period is to accept the way our lives have gone and reach some spiritual peace. One way to facilitate this process is through a “life review” that allows a re-examination of what previously may have been considered regrets or mistakes. From the perspective of this stage, we may dis-

cover that certain actions were not mistakes after all, but indeed necessary for the lessons to be learned. By reframing events, it is possible for them to be seen as intimately connected to how things were meant to evolve.

An appreciation of the officials of the Metal element is helpful here. The Colon is responsible for releasing, in addition to food that cannot be utilized by the body, all aspects that no longer nourish us. It is a function that is paramount at this time, if we are to let go of old judgments and make peace with the journey. The autumn also asks us to lighten our burden, and letting go, which is the work of this minister, is certainly required to detach from material possessions. In the physical realm, a person who is too attached to her body is doomed to despair as she grows older, no matter how many cosmetic surgeries are performed. We can see why the ancient Chinese associated grief with an imbalance in Metal, and how a healthy Colon allows us to adjust to life's changes so that we don't succumb to depression in the elder years. Once this official has done his job of emptying, it is possible to take in on a deeper level. The sister minister of the Lung then allows us to receive inspiration—which is to say, bring in spirit. Only by transitioning to a non-material point of view can an individual grow older with dignity and grace, meeting the specific challenges of the Metal phase.

Carl Jung, through his own inner explorations and work with clients, was deeply aware of these natural cycles. In his essay "The Stages of Life," he describes the process of growing older in a way that clearly draws upon Five Element wisdom:

Aging people should know that their lives are not mounting and expanding, but that an inexorable inner process enforces the contraction of life. For a young person it is almost a sin, or at least a danger, to be too preoccupied with himself; but for the aging person it is a duty and a necessity to devote serious attention to himself. . . .

The significance of the morning [of human life] undoubtedly lies in the development of the individual, our entrenchment in the outer world, the propagation of our kind, and the care of our children. This is the obvious purpose of nature. But when this purpose has been attained—and more than attained—shall the earning of money, the extension of conquests, and the expansion of life go steadily on beyond the bounds of all reason and sense? Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning, must pay for it with damage to his soul.¹⁴

From the model of Jungian psychology, the Metal element corresponds to the Sage, the archetype of wisdom. Whenever, in the course of development, a person begins to think for herself and ask the question *why*, we can be sure this image is manifesting. Though needed at every stage of life, the inner Sage is often unavailable until a person has accumulated some life experience. For example, the history of warfare is full of magnificent warriors who fought and died for the wrong cause, simply because they lacked awareness. It takes this archetype to question authority, which is the reason it is the young who are generally sent off to fight in war. When it comes to relationships, wisdom is needed in order to avoid naïveté and assess the other person realistically, keeping one's balance in the demanding world of Lover energy. It is worth noting that, in most cases, the ability to access the Sage develops through first making the “mistakes” that are an unavoidable part of the journey. As has been said, “The only way we learn what is enough, is when we have done more than enough.”

In traditional cultures, where the people live in harmony with these principles, we find the archetype of the Sage personified in *the ritual elder* who performs the ceremonies that create “sacred space.” This is a valuable contribution to everyone in the tribe, allowing regeneration through connection to the spirit. Understandably, this role will usually be reserved for someone in his or her later years, as the Sage only becomes fully manifest after a person has experienced

the spring, summer, and harvest of life. Through fully expressing the energies of the Wood, Fire, and Earth stages, the quality and spirit of the Metal time is then attained. It is indeed tragic the way Western culture diminishes the value of this phase when, in societies more in touch with nature, those in the autumn of their lives are revered for bringing the community meaning and wisdom.

CASE HISTORY: Awareness of these patterns allows us to embrace the rhythms of life, carrying with it an outlook that is in harmony with the way things are in nature. I once treated a woman in her early seventies who was well known in her community as a singer in chorales and church groups and also had some professional experience in opera. Though she had over the years brought inspiration to many through her musical abilities, at this time she had made the decision to completely give up singing. As her physician, I wondered whether her retirement indicated an underlying depression. When I explored this with her, she was able to state with clarity, "I have done that work, it was fulfilling and now it is over." Knowledge of the Five Element model allowed me to see that she had enjoyed her harvest, and this transition was indeed healthy. The letting go was very much appropriate to her stage of life. Had she not lived out her destiny and still harbored unlived life, it would have been different; in this case, her work in the world was complete and she was simply accepting the autumn-time. Chinese medicine provided a lens that confirmed what this woman intuitively knew to be the natural course of events.

It is important to emphasize that being in this period does not preclude a person from undertaking a new project, developing her creativity, or even revisiting old modes of expression. Very often it is an essential aspect of the Metal phase to write, reflect, and teach, so that the wisdom gleaned from life experience can be passed on to the next generation. What is critical is that these endeavors be approached with an attitude more fitting to this season. In fact, about

a year later, this same patient developed diarrhea and bronchitis, indicators from our model that there may be issues in the Colon and Lung officials. As we together evaluated what the symptoms were saying about the functions of letting go and receiving, it led to reconsidering her decision to abandon music. Eventually, she came to the conclusion that it was now right for her to resume singing. She even told me, "I am having a springtime within my autumn," implying that her creativity (Wood) was now manifesting in a way that was consistent with the quality of Metal. Her statement reflected Five Element wisdom accrued from life experience—and it was remarkable to observe the tranquility she brought to her musical expression. Far less concerned with issues of achievement, she was able to sing for the enjoyment of herself and a few close friends. Instead of bursting forth into new activities as would be suitable to the spring of life, there was a sense of ease as she simply allowed the spirit to move through her and gave it voice. The wisdom of the Sage archetype was evident in "the calmness within the activity" that imbued her efforts.

THE WATER STAGE OF LIFE: RETIREMENT AND REST

This once stood among mankind,
in the midst of Fate the annihilator, in the midst
of Not-Knowing-Whither, it stood as if enduring, and bent
stars down to it from their safeguarded heavens. . . .
Wasn't all this a miracle?¹⁵

—Rilke

In the wintertime the downward direction of the energy, which began in the late summer, moves to the nadir. The life processes continue to contract and all things return to the Source. This is the period that symbolizes completion of the circle, as the activity of nature comes to a rest. The winter season also holds the potential

for what is to come and, in this pause between the cycles, we intuitively sense the deep mystery of existence.

For humans, this Water phase, the winter of our lives, would correspond to old age. This is the stage when we can finally allow ourselves to be still. Now it is imperative to withdraw attention from outer work and turn to the inner world, as one prepares for the inevitable passing. Louis Armstrong, in his rendition of the jazz classic “Rocking Chair,”¹⁶ creates a poignant image of spending one’s days just sitting. The folksinger Pete Seeger, himself an example of how to deal with the relentless physical decline with dignity and grace, provides much needed humor:

I get up each morning and dust off my wits,
Open the paper and read the obits.
If I’m not there,
I know I’m not dead,
So I eat a good breakfast and go back to bed.¹⁷

In his last years, Einstein was quoted as saying, “I live in that solitude which is painful in youth, but delicious in the years of maturity.”¹⁸ And the old Chinese poets, who sought a simple life through retreating to the mountains, also welcomed the qualities represented by this element:

As the years go by, give me but peace,
freedom from the ten thousand ensnarements.
I ask myself and always answer:
What can be better than coming home?
A wind from the pine-trees blows my sash,
And my lute is bright with the mountain moon.
You ask me about good and evil fortune? . . .
Hark, on the lake there’s a fisherman singing!¹⁹

In the modern world, we must come to terms with this energetic shift in the face of a dominant cultural bias that values expansion and

the activity of youth. Nature, however, dictates another set of priorities at this time: learning to be quiet, facing one's mortality, and finding the faith that allows a person to deal with the fear of death. Again, understanding the natural rhythms provides support for the challenges presented here. Specifically, we find that being in touch with wisdom brings an acceptance of the wholeness of life. The concept of *yin/yang*, for instance, teaches that there cannot be summer without winter, or day without night. The movement of the elements reminds us that the best preparation for being content in the winter is to live fully in the earlier seasons. Only through planting the seeds for growth in the active time of Wood, experiencing the joys of the Fire element, completing the harvest in the Earth phase, and knowing the spiritual fulfillment of Metal, can we enter the Water years without regrets. Witness the positive attributes with which Walt Whitman embraces this stage in his "Song of the Open Road":

Journeyers with their own sublime old age of manhood
or womanhood,
Old age, calm, expanded, broad with the haughty
breadth of the universe,
Old age, flowing free with the delicious near-by freedom
of death.²⁰

The concluding piece in the individuation process, and the culmination in the development of the archetypes, is the constellation of the inner King.²¹ The calmness that this image represents corresponds to the stillness of the winter, and the source of fertility provided by this archetype is analogous to the seminal energy found in the Water element. We can recognize the connection to the time of retirement in the way the Sovereign does not accomplish anything through his own activity, instead ruling from *non-doing*. When we have accomplished the tasks of the Warrior, relished in the joys of the Lover, cultivated the compassion of the Queen, and developed

the wisdom of the Sage, we are then able to rest in the calm centeredness of the King archetype. In cultures rooted in the natural world, it was not until this final chapter that a person was considered to have come into what it means to be a complete man or woman. These societies valued their elders for holding these archetypal qualities for the tribe, honoring the contribution they brought to the common good by their mere presence. It is a connection to “the Sovereign on the throne” that provides the vision to imbue life’s rhythm with a higher purpose and, as the Book of Proverbs points out, “Without a vision, the people perish.”²²

CASE HISTORY: Clearly, different rules apply in the evening than in the morning. A woman in her early eighties who came in for treatment related her frustration and anger at the endless home repairs she was facing and at the irresponsibility of the contractor involved. When I suggested that she might bring the wisdom of her years to this issue, she was immediately able to establish a viewpoint more appropriate to her stage of life. Through turning inward and reflecting on her memories of a life well lived, she reclaimed the calmness of her inner King. Once balance was restored, she could also deal more effectively with the external demands. At this season, the more important priority was to hold a center that was richer and more constant than material concerns. Her attitude was now in harmony with the timeless wisdom of the elements.

D. H. Lawrence, in his poem entitled “Beautiful Old Age,” describes the sense of fullness and completion that comes as we enter the wintertime of life:

It ought to be lovely to be old
to be full of the peace that comes of experience
and wrinkled ripe fulfillment.

The wrinkled smile of completeness that follows a life
lived undaunted and unsoured with accepted lies.

If people lived without accepting lies
they would ripen like apples, and be scented like pippins
in their old age.

Soothing, old people should be, like apples
when one is tired of love.
Fragrant like yellowing leaves, and dim with the soft
stillness and satisfaction of autumn.

And a girl should say:
It must be wonderful to live and grow old.
Look at my mother, how rich and still she is! —
And a young man should think: By Jove
my father has faced all weathers, but it's been a life!²³

In this time of stillness we reach the end of the journey and face the final letting go: death itself. If we live our lives conscious of the energies of the natural world, we understand the rest of winter to be essential for the whole. To the degree that we are able in the later stages of life to be in touch with qualities that are eternal, it is possible to have faith in the continuity of the soul. Through love connections that endure, we sense that, in a very real way, we will live on. Though the physical body must disintegrate, on the level of the spirit this end is only a new beginning. Just as the spring follows the winter in nature, we can appreciate the way the passage begins anew at every ending. Indeed, when we know our individual existence to be part of the Infinite, there is an acceptance that, on the deepest level, all is as it should be. The *I Ching* provides some reassurance here:

We learn by observing the beginnings and endings of life that birth and death form one recurrent cycle. Birth is the coming forth into the world of the visible; death is the return into the regions of the invisible. Neither of these signifies an absolute beginning nor an absolute ending, any more than do the changes of the seasons within the year. Nor is it otherwise in the case of man.²⁴

NOTES

1. *The Holy Scriptures*, revised by Alexander Harkavy (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1936), Ecclesiastes 3: 1–8.
2. Rabbi Zalman Schacter, Lecture entitled “The Spiritual Elder,” 1993.
3. Rainer Maria Rilke, “The Seventh Duino Elegy,” in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 187.
4. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970), p. 17.
5. Wayne Souza, *Conversations on the meaning of life*, 1985.
6. *I Ching*, Bollingen Series, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), Hexagram 25, *Innocence*, p.102.
7. Rainer Maria Rilke, “The Seventh Duino Elegy,” in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, p. 187.
8. Kahlil Gibran, *Letters to Mary Haskell* (Boulder: Blue Mountain Press, 1976), p. 43.
9. As we have seen, life is a journey toward wholeness. It is quite common, in Western culture, for women and men to move in opposite directions in the development of these first two archetypes. Whereas men typically are expected to be Warriors at an early age, women may be strong in Lover energy. The task later in adulthood then involves accessing the archetype that has been neglected. This can be observed in women bringing forth the qualities of the Warrior during mid-life, beginning new careers or artistic expressions, particularly when the children have left home. Conversely, men have the opportunity at this stage of awakening the dormant Lover inside. No wonder long-term relationships can be so challenging, as it can seem that we are “ships passing in the night.”
10. *I Ching*, Hexagram 55, *Abundance*, p. 213.
11. Rainer Maria Rilke, “The Seventh Duino Elegy,” in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, pp. 187–189.
12. Pablo Neruda, *One Hundred Love Sonnets*, trans. Stephen Tapscott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 35.
13. Rainer Maria Rilke, “The Seventh Duino Elegy,” in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, p. 189.
14. C. G. Jung, “The Stages of Life,” in *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), pp. 17–18.
15. Rainer Maria Rilke, “The Seventh Duino Elegy,” in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, pp. 189–191.

16. Louis Armstrong and Jack Teagarden, "Rocking Chair," on *C'est Ci Bon* (New York: Victor Records, 1947).
17. Pete Seeger, "Get Up and Go," on *Young vs. Old* (New York: Columbia Records).
18. Albert Einstein, as quoted by Hans-Josef Kuepper on his website: <http://www.einstein-website.de/biography-e.htm>.
19. Wang Wei, "Answering Vice-Prefect Chang," in *The Jade Mountain*, trans. Witter Bynner (New York: Vintage Books, 1929), p. 193.
20. Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1992), p. 157.
21. Though we have earlier discussed the image of the King as corresponding to the Heart official and part of the Fire element, in the progressive development of the archetypal energies through life he is the last piece of the puzzle and, thus, is related here to the Water stage. The comparison of models should not be expected to produce a perfect fit. If we are willing to work in the spirit of these traditions, however, juxtaposing symbols from different models can certainly be useful in enriching our understanding.
22. *The Holy Scriptures*, Proverbs 29:18.
23. D.H. Lawrence, "Beautiful Old Age," in *Pansies: Poems* (London: Martin Secker, 1929), pp. 93–94.
24. *I Ching*, "The Great Treatise," p. 294.

CHAPTER 11

Resolving Emotional Imbalances

Deeper Insights into the K'o Cycle

Life leads the thoughtful person on a path of many windings.

Now the course is checked, now it runs straight again.

Here winged thoughts may pour freely forth in words,

There the heavy burden of knowledge must be shut away
in silence.

But when two people are at one in their inmost hearts,

They shatter even the strength of iron or of bronze.

And when two people understand each other in their
inmost hearts,

Their words are sweet and strong like the fragrance of orchids.¹

—*I Ching*

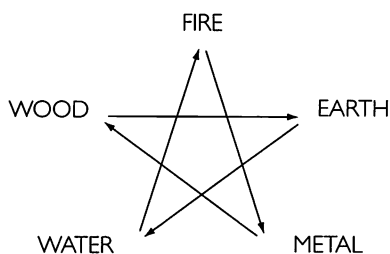
The beautiful images in the above selection from the *I Ching* hexagram entitled *Fellowship with Men* bear testimony to the enduring strength of love. Since the passage originates from the Chinese classics, it is bound to reflect the perennial models that we have been describing. A good example of this is found in the lines: “When two people are at one in their inmost hearts, they shatter even the strength of iron or of bronze.” This metaphor for Fire overcoming Metal clearly reflects the *k'o* or control-cycle of the elements. As we continue to explore sources of ancient wisdom, recognizing the underlying patterns adds another level of insight.

相 克 序

The Control
Cycle

In the previous chapter, working with the *sheng* cycle enhanced the ways in which we view the seasons of a human life. Now we will turn our attention to the *k'o* cycle. After reviewing these elemental relationships in nature, our particular focus will be on the arena of human emotions. We will find that, as a guide for uncovering the specific energy that can facilitate the resolution of emotional disturbances, the control-cycle is truly unsurpassed. Acupuncturists can apply these energetic principles in their choice of points, and anyone can benefit from an awareness of these connections, for they serve as powerful tools for balancing emotions in ourselves and in others.²

In descriptions of the *k'o* cycle, there is frequently an emphasis on the restrictive or even destructive aspects, as each element seems to subdue another. Wood limits an unstable Earth, Earth contains the flow of Water, Water dampens a raging Fire, Fire softens the hardness of Metal, and Metal, in turn, cuts down a growing tree. The following diagram was introduced earlier in our discussion:



In the Five Element tradition as commonly practiced there exists another possibility, however, derived naturally from observing the seasonal rhythm. Fundamental to this approach is an appreciation of the way these relationships actually support, harmonize, and assist each other so that the energies can function optimally. Ultimately, accessing the balancing influence across the control-cycle maintains the health of each of the elements.³

For example, the energy of Wood allows the tasks of the Earth phase to be accomplished, since the sowing of the seeds in the springtime permits a harvest in the late summer. Likewise, without the abundance of the Earth, there simply will not be a vital Water element. Only by storing the roots and grains at the time of the harvest can the rest of winter take place. Imagine the fear (the emotion associated with Water) that would arise during this season, in a person who is out in the snow desperately pulling the bark off trees in order to survive, because of a lack of a food supply. Similarly, the Water element contains the essence, the potential for the future unfolding, that eventually finds its manifestation in Fire. Going into the darkness and building the reservoirs during the rest of winter creates the possibility for the flourishing in the summer to come. Hence, it is said, "Fire is the fullest expression of what I can be, based on the seed of who I am."⁴ Continuing our tour of the *k'o* cycle, it is by coming forth completely in the time of the Fire energy, and burning up all that needs to be consumed, that the letting go of Metal becomes welcomed. Through realizing maturity during the summertime of life, we are then prepared to turn inward and embrace the spirit in the autumn. Jung provides us with a lovely metaphor for this process:

After having lavished its light upon the world,
the sun withdraws its rays
in order to illuminate itself.⁵

Lastly, the Metal element enhances Wood. On the physical level, the leaves that fall off of the trees in the autumn provide the mulch for the new growth in spring. On the spirit level, it is the connection with the meaning of Metal that brings inspiration and quality to the work of the Wood period. Essentially, this particular elemental pattern is a description of the archetype of death and rebirth. Only by allowing oneself to fully experience the grief that comes

with a loss, for instance, can the next possible experience be born over time. Indeed, it is a truth observed throughout the natural world that the process of letting go is indispensable for something new to emerge. In the words of Rumi,

Spring comes after the fall of the leaves,
which is proof enough of the fact of resurrection.⁶

RELEASING ANGER

In the tradition of the Five Elements we are constantly invoking these supportive connections of the control-cycle, especially in dealing with emotional issues. We may recall the case history of the woman who complained of hip pain along the Gall Bladder meridian (discussed in chapter 1 on pages 14–15). Upon exploring her problem in depth, she was found to be holding on to anger over a period of years. As is typical for a person with a Central Focus in Wood, she was stuck in an emotion that was manifesting in tension and frustration throughout her body. The initial steps in treatment involved acknowledging the validity of her perceptions and treating the patient's Wood element through acupuncture. This brought some improvement in symptoms, but she was still caught up in the negative feelings. At this point, the challenge was to find a way to shift the energy.

For healing to take place, the woman clearly needed to release her anger. Looking to the Five Element model, it is Metal that controls Wood across the *k'o* cycle. Through addressing the Colon official, the process of emptying out all that was no longer serving her could be supported, enabling this woman to let go of an emotion that had turned self-destructive. Treatment, of course, could take many forms in addition to needles. A simple exercise from the

Tibetan Buddhist tradition, which consists of squeezing the fists, scrunching the face, gathering pressure in the head and shoulders, and then discharging the built up tension with a loud shout, enabled her to release frustrations on both the physical and emotional levels.

Supporting this patient's Metal element also meant adopting a spiritual perspective, which could then allow her to transcend personal resentments and see the universal nature of the situation. By shifting from blaming another to considering what was being asked of her (an inquiry that requires the wisdom of Metal), the entire struggle began to acquire a sense of meaning and purpose. When it became apparent how the lessons of letting go could benefit her in other areas of life, she realized the potential for growth that could come from this experience; as we have seen, growth is the central issue for a person with a Wood pattern. Indeed, it was a connection to the qualities of Metal that ultimately enabled this woman to find the forgiveness that eventually brought a resolution to her issues in the Wood element.

On the archetypal level, it is the Sage who tones down an overzealous Warrior by bringing in the aspect of awareness. Sage energy is required to question the purpose of any endeavor so that the Warrior is not in service of a false King. The balancing effect of this archetype is analogous to the *k'o* cycle relationship that the corresponding element, Metal, exerts on Wood. This controlling influence may also be seen in the way this image can effectively establish the inner peace that is then able to temper the workaholic's fixation on accomplishment with the ability to simply let things be. In general, the Sage brings in quality and spirit that can manifest in all of the Warrior's tasks. In this case history, the patient could choose to remain righteously indignant (and make herself sick in the process), or draw upon the archetype of wisdom, which allowed her to let go and move on.

QUIETING ANXIETY

We have considered how Fire energy relies on Water for the seed and potential that determines what can be brought to expression over time. The need for a healthy connection between these two elements is readily apparent on the emotional level as well. We can literally feel the energetic effect across the *k'o* cycle that occurs when an out of balance Water element puts out the Fire in a social situation, as the associated fear destroys natural enthusiasm and spontaneity. Rilke captures this emotional interplay in the following poem:

You playmates of mine in the scattered parks of the city,
small friends from a childhood of long ago. . . .
When we were filled with *joy*
it belonged to no one: it was simply there.
And how it dissolved among all the adults who passed by
and in the *fears* of the endless year.⁷

Certainly, nothing dampens joy as much as excessive fear.

What about the person in whom the Fire element is out of control? Typically, she may be highly anxious and wildly excited about new prospects, especially when it concerns the realm of relationships. Fire can be all consuming and tend to flare up all over the place, being observed in a red, flushed face and in typical symptoms such as insomnia, headache, and high blood pressure. What does this individual need? She obviously would benefit from calming down — “chilling out,” as my kids would say. Again, looking to the control-cycle of the elements, it is the stillness of Water that can balance the restlessness of an excessively stimulated Fire element. A regular meditation practice, for example, that allows a person to quiet down on a daily basis helps the Heart official hold the center and can be a useful adjunct in reinforcing this elemental influence.

Often an individual with a Fire CF may become so fixated on personal connections, and preoccupied with the importance of her own drama, that she becomes narcissistic and totally self-absorbed. To control this tendency, the vast reserves of Water provide a way to go down to the depths and surrender more limited ego concerns. Here, a healthy Water element brings the courage to embrace the essential value of all people. In the specific case of a disharmony in the Heart official, there will generally be a lack of calmness, and an agitated “Supreme Controller” is likely to manifest in characteristic ways. Directing this energy toward others carries the stigma of being labeled a “control freak,” and it is a sure prescription for creating resentments and ill feelings. From Water we acquire the ability to flow and to allow events to take their natural course. These qualities can remedy an overbearing expression of the Fire element, an expression that ends up destroying the very relationships the person so desperately craves.

WHEN SYMPATHY BECOMES SICKENINGLY SWEET

There is a *Seinfeld* episode in which Jerry repeatedly returns to a certain barber, despite the fact that he consistently receives terrible-looking haircuts. When called on this behavior, he replies in a singsong voice:

I’ve been going to him for twelve years, I can’t switch, I’d hurt his feelings. . . . I can’t [stop going], I’d break his heart.

This is a classic Earth response, demonstrating an overabundance of sympathy—at Jerry’s own expense. Kramer has no patience for these excuses and leaves abruptly while shouting the comment, “Gee, you’re crazy!” Even George is able to offer sound counsel to his

friend: "You gotta start seeing somebody else, get out of this relationship." What energy are his friends providing? Undoubtedly, their comments reflect the clarity and strength of Wood, which can control an Earth element that is unable to contain its dominant emotion. It takes Wood to set a boundary and, in the powerful image of Kramer holding his hand in front of Jerry in a vain attempt to stop him, we see a clear enactment of the control-cycle interplay of Wood upon Earth.

It is very common for those with an Earth imbalance to endlessly nurture and care for everybody else. Frequently, in this need to please others the Earth person fails to set reasonable limits and, in time, hurts himself and even those he intended to help. This pattern was aptly demonstrated in another *Seinfeld* show, when Jerry wears an outrageous looking "puffy shirt" on national television, simply because he was unable to decline a request by its creator. In the end, his hostility comes out during a talk show interview and causes far more damage than if he had been able to hold his ground in the first place. As surely as trees can stabilize a hillside, Wood energy provides the structure that is required to control this overweening sympathy. On the level of the emotions, we find this *k'o* cycle relationship manifested in the observation that a healthy anger can bring the motivation to stand up for oneself. When mothering behavior spills out all over the place it soon becomes sickeningly sweet; it is then sure to produce a reaction of anger in others and feelings of resentment within oneself. This compensatory shift to Wood naturally seeks to rein in Earth energy that has become excessive.

From a Jungian perspective, Wood is associated with the Warrior, whose job it is to defend the boundaries of the empire. This archetypal image, with its focus on getting the job done, is certainly not worried about hurting another's feelings. Here is the perfect balancing aspect that allows an individual with an Earth CF to control

a pattern that tends to know no bounds. Turned inward, an imbalance in the Earth element frequently leads to feeling sorry for oneself and can eventuate in self-indulgent addictive behaviors, such as drug abuse and overeating. From the Warrior comes the discipline and limit setting that is the natural remedy for this tendency. The determination and direction of the Warrior can also establish the energy that permits the genuine concern of Earth to find its appropriate expression. With a plan and vision (Liver official), sympathy can be put into action, such as through the decision to become a nurse, fight for a cause, volunteer in the community, or go to acupuncture school. In this way, the energy of Earth is able to find healthy fulfillment through service.

In thinking about the most effective way to apply the controlling element, whether as a health care practitioner or in any relationship, it is important to first establish rapport.⁸ This usually means meeting a person in the element of their Central Focus. Especially with an Earth person who is craving sympathy, it is wise to initially offer the understanding that provides support, while letting them know you care. Similarly, to approach an individual who is full of anger (and has an imbalance in the Wood element) with a statement from Metal, such as “it’s all one,” would be laughably ineffective unless some preliminary work is done. As a general principle, matching the energy of another person is the best way to establish an influential connection.

To really exert a beneficial effect, however, it may become imperative, in time, to consciously switch the energy that is being expressed. With an imbalance in Earth, for example, offering sympathy may at some point simply be indulging feelings of self-pity and certainly will not lead to constructive change. Eventually, there is the likelihood of merely becoming co-dependent in a destructive pattern. Invoking the element that is the controller across the *k’o*

cycle then becomes a valuable tool for restoring balance to an emotion that has become problematic. To work energetically in this manner requires the development of a range of expression in one's own life, so that there is a reasonable ability to tap into each of the elements. Often we are unable to offer a healing presence to another person simply because we are not, in ourselves, in touch with the specific energy that is being called for. Indeed, one of the gifts of working with the model of the Five Elements is the way in which, as we become aware of the energies, each of us is encouraged toward wholeness.

ENDURING EXISTENTIAL GRIEF

Metal symbolizes our connection with the quality of things and with spirit. When a person is cut off from this source of meaning, there exists a profound emptiness. Often a crisis in this element is precipitated by a loss and there is at first nothing to be done but to be with the pain. It is important at such times to stay empty and still, and to allow the grief to wash over us in silence. In a story from the Bible, Job's three friends travel to be with him after he loses his children, possessions, and physical health. Realizing the depth of his suffering, they sit with him for seven days and nights without saying a word. Where, in our modern world, can we find the time for such an expression of concern?

Fundamental to the experience of this existential despair is the feeling of isolation that accompanies it. Intuitively, we sense the value of relationship. It is said that "there is room in an illness for one."⁹ Establishing a human connection, or any intervention that brings the person back into the stream of life, could end the terrible loneliness—and is sure to have a curative effect. Here is the value of Fire energy, which controls Metal across the *k'o* cycle. We see this influence operating, for instance, in the case of an elderly woman

who becomes depressed after her husband has died, especially if she is living alone and at some distance from family members. To counteract the coldness that stems from this lack of human contact, taking in a pet provides the comfort and warmth of a living creature and will often work wonders to lift a person's mood. So, the companionship and joy that is an expression of the Fire element can help resolve the grief of Metal.

The question, again, is how to find the right approach, as someone who is overcome with grief certainly has no interest in a frivolous, light-hearted Fire. Inviting the individual to a party simply would not work; neither do clever tricks or superficial attempts at fixing the problem. The solution, rather, is to come in with a respectful, subdued tone that resonates with Metal energy. One way to accomplish this is to speak in the voice that one would use in a cathedral or holy place. By showing respect for the difficulty of the situation, and honoring the person for all that is being endured, the helpful intention might then be able to be received (the function of the Lung official). The goal is to respond with the appropriate energy, and just to be in the person's presence in the face of such a loss—one human being with another—should be considered a victory. As in *The Book of Job*, to sit with the grieving person provides contact with life, and this little flame may be Fire enough. When confronted with the abyss of eternity, in fact, relationship may be the most valuable factor in helping another find the strength to accept the inevitable. Through connection to others, one's spirit continues to survive in the world. In the end, love overcomes death, a sentiment that is powerfully described in these lines from Pablo Neruda:

While life harasses us, love is only a wave taller than the other waves:
but oh, when death comes knocking at the gate,
there is only your glance against so much *emptiness*,
only your light against extinction,
only your *love* to shut out the shadows.¹⁰

FACING OUR FEARS

The final emotional state we will consider is fear, which arises when the Water element is out of balance. Like a raging river or torrential rainstorm, this feeling can be truly overwhelming. In nature, if faced with a flood, animals seek higher ground, instinctively knowing the value of solid land. In the same way, we can look across the *k'o* cycle to the Earth energy for the support that is able to contain fear. Finding an “inner home” where we can feel safe would be, metaphorically speaking, the antidote for this emotion when it is out of control. Sitting in meditation, especially prior to being confronted with fear, is a way to practice cultivating such a constant, secure place within, so that it can be available when needed.

In attempting to comfort someone in fear, once the situation is acknowledged, the principles of the Five Elements would suggest providing a grounding, understanding presence. In this situation it matters little what words are actually chosen; the idea is to *be* the Earth. In many cases, touching from this element, which can be described as the way a mother might hold a frightened child, can in fact be far more effective than speaking. The goal is to offer the steady and nurturing influence that allows a person to face fear.

On the archetypal level, Earth is associated with the image of the Queen, the Great Mother who provides comfort in times of need. This eternal feminine principle is a symbol that runs so deep in our psyches that we universally find her used to describe the human soul. It is from this energy that we derive faith and trust. Throughout the ages, people have evoked the healing power of the Queen archetype in the very human struggle to overcome fear, a reflection of the control-cycle relationship of Earth and Water. A Hebrew prayer expresses this connection in the phrase, “As long as

my soul is with my body, the Lord is with me; I am not afraid.”¹¹ Another line from the prayerbook, based on the wisdom of this elemental pattern, states simply that “God is my salvation, I shall trust and not fear.”¹² Along the same lines, Fritz Smith, the founder of the bodywork system of Zero Balancing, would share with patients the teaching, “When fear knocks, if faith answers, then no one’s home.”¹³ Indeed, if a person feels supported by the primal source of nourishment represented by the Great Mother within, a fundamental trust in life will arise to help see him through, and then there is no way for the fear to take hold.



In summary, we can speak of “five resolutions for emotional imbalances,” which are based on the *k’o* cycle relationships of the elements.¹⁴ For the anger of Wood, the antidote is forgiveness, which depends on Metal for letting go and spiritual meaning. To counteract the anxiety and egoism of Fire, the remedy is stillness and surrender, qualities that are associated with the Water element. For the excessive sympathy of Earth, balance is restored through the boundaries and service that come from Wood. When confronted with the grief of Metal, the relationship and connection of Fire brings an end to isolation. Finally, for the fear of Water, we look to the Earth element for containment and faith. Though Five Element practitioners can select points to access the meridian that is called for, anyone can intentionally offer the energy appropriate to the situation. Modulating our interactions with others so that the specific element that balances the energies across the control-cycle is brought in, is an example of practicing acupuncture without needles. In ancient times, this was regarded as the highest form of healing.

CASE HISTORY: The *k'o* cycle, though always present in Five Element thinking, may in some patients be the primary dynamic in their therapeutic process. I treated one older woman who originally came to me for complaints of gastritis and, in addition, suffered from intermittent bouts of panic and anxiety. A retired nurse, she was overweight and had an obvious caring, sympathetic manner. She was a classic Earth imbalance—and it was not hard to see that she was mothering everybody, often at her own expense.

I started treatment by supporting the Earth element, since that was her Central Focus. Though the stomach condition responded immediately to acupuncture, it soon became clear that the energetic imbalance relevant to the illness involved an inability to set boundaries. Whenever her children called to ask if she could watch the grandchildren, she would immediately acquiesce, dropping whatever plans she might have made with her friends. This upset others while creating internal resentments that eventually manifested in excess stomach acid. If this underlying pattern involving the control-cycle relationship of Wood and Earth was not addressed, it was quite likely that the patient's presenting symptoms would return. As she had previously attended classes I had given on the Five Elements, I could reinforce treatment on the Liver and Gall Bladder pathways with the image from nature of trees controlling an unstable earth.

Looking for ways to further enhance the therapy, we talked about the image of the Warrior and this archetype's similarity to Wood. The patient immediately resonated with the idea of finding her own inner Warrior as a way to develop this much-needed energy. Having synchronistically just read a book on the subject, she returned at our next visit excited about the story of "Sacagawea," the Indian woman who helped Lewis and Clark in their exploration of the Northwest. This image was to become a powerful symbol of the feminine Warrior for the patient, and an ally in her life. She was able to acquire a

picture of this strong young Native American, which she then put on the dresser at home. Subsequently, when her kids would phone and ask, "Mom, we want to go out, could you come over and watch the kids?," she could look at this image and find the strength to say, "No," if indeed that was her truth.

Working with the archetype took the treatments to another level. Sacagawea's tale became so meaningful that, at one point, the patient even went on a pilgrimage, travelling to the place in Wyoming where the Indian woman is buried, thereby deepening her connection to all that the story symbolized. Through such an undertaking, her relationship to the feminine Warrior became more solidly a part of her life. As she learned to internalize this energy, the patient became increasingly able to access healthy Wood, which could then control a dysfunctional Earth element that had been present for a lifetime. Through finding the self-help tools that allowed her to bring in the balancing element across the *k'o* cycle, she also became less dependent on acupuncture.

Then, about six months later, this woman had to check into the local hospital for a shoulder operation and, as is common when facing surgery, experienced overwhelming fear. Her Wood element was now strong, her Earth was much more stable and grounded, but her Water energy was clearly struggling, manifesting in this emotion. Through a combination of acupuncture therapy and visualization of the archetype of the Queen within, the energy of Earth could be made available to Water via the natural connection of the elements, allowing the fear to be brought under control.

The final step in this patient's process occurred once her Water element was healthier, and we could finally address the panic and anxiety that were part of her original complaint. Seen in Chinese medicine as an imbalance in Fire, and in the Heart official specifically, it was now possible to treat points that use the energy of Water to

bring stillness to the Fire element, thereby relieving this distressing symptom. The energetic pattern critical to restoring health had involved three legs of the control-cycle: Wood providing a boundary for an overly sympathetic Earth, Earth containing the fear of Water, and Water quieting the anxiety that often is indicative of a disturbance in the Fire element. Addressing each elemental relationship in sequence worked marvelously in this case to allow the resolution of long-standing expressions of emotional disharmony.

Since they follow universal patterns of nature, we find that these elemental relationships appear unbidden in the lives of individuals, from ancient China to the modern world. This woman was not, of course, initially aware of the Law of the Five Elements; she was just trying to deal with the challenges that were presented to her by illness. As in the story of a real human being, poems, if they are true to life, also express these eternal principles. In this timeless spiritual statement from Goethe, we are taken on a journey around the *k'o* cycle of the elements:

Tell a wise person, or else keep silent,
because the massman will mock it right away.
I praise what is truly alive,
what longs to be burned to death.

In the calm *water* of the love-nights,
where you were begotten, where you have begotten,
a strange feeling comes over you
when you see the silent candle burning.

Now you are no longer caught
in the obsession with darkness,
and a desire for higher *love-making*
sweeps you upward.

Distance does not make you falter,
now, arriving in magic, flying,

and, finally, insane for the light,
you are the butterfly and you are gone.

And so long as you haven't experienced
this: to *die* and so to *grow*,
you are only a troubled guest
on the dark *earth*.¹⁵

NOTES

1. *I Ching*, Bollingen Series, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), Hexagram 13, *Fellowship with Men*, p. 59.
2. Observing the acupuncture practices of Beverly Heller and Sarah Arnstein in Los Angeles back in 1979 first made me aware of the prominent role that the *k'o* cycle can play in treating emotional issues, as presented in this chapter.
3. One of the many formative contributions of Professor Worsley is the emphasis he placed on the positive influence exerted by the controlling element across the *k'o* cycle.
4. Julia Measures, "Seminar on the Officials," Watsonville, California, 1981.
5. C. G. Jung, "The Stages of Life," in *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 17.
6. Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), p. 60.
7. Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Sonnets to Orpheus," in *The Selected Poetry of Rilke*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 243 (italics added).
8. Many of these ideas for applying the *k'o* cycle relationships in a practical way evolved from teaching seminars on the Five Elements alongside Mary Huse, my colleague and friend. With the participation of students, we have acted out these scenarios in the classroom, learning first-hand the various *k'o* cycle connections.
9. Wayne Souza, "Workshop on the Wounded Healer," Santa Rosa, California, 1990.
10. Pablo Neruda, *One Hundred Love Sonnets*, trans. Stephen Tapscott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 191 (italics added).
11. *Daily Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949), p. 786.

12. *The Complete Artscroll Siddur* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1985), p. 655.
13. Fritz Smith, M.D., "Seminars on the Five Elements," 1981.
14. These "five resolutions for emotional imbalances" were developed in conversations with Fritz Smith that occurred during the first few years of my acupuncture practice, generally after racquetball games. They are listed on the bottom of the Associations chart, found in chapter 4 on p. 80.
15. Goethe, "The Holy Longing," in *News of the Universe*, ed. Robert Bly (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980), p. 70 (*italics added*).

CHAPTER 12

Origins of the Five Element Model

The Shift from Four to Five in the I Ching

What need has nature of thought and care?
In nature all things return to their common source
and are distributed along different paths;
Through one action, the fruits of a hundred thoughts
are realized.¹

—*I Ching*

The elemental model that is used by most of the acupuncture world is the one based on the Yellow River Map of Fu Hsi (described on page 50). Derived from pairs of opposites, this *yin/yang* arrangement is the oldest statement of the elements, dating back to the origins of Chinese culture. Since Earth holds the center, it is essentially an image of *four* directions, and these positions determine the way the energies are seen to interact. The question arises as to where the circular relationship of the Five Elements, transmitted by Professor J. R. Worsley and applied throughout this book, assumed its current form. For the answer we can turn to the *I Ching*.

Through the study of this revered source of wisdom, we can discover the evolution of Chinese thinking. The hexagrams are constructed from *yin* and *yang* lines and, indeed, the earliest stratum of

the book was based primarily on this worldview. The most ancient circular arrangement of the trigrams, also attributed to Fu Hsi, placed these building-blocks of the text as mirror images (Figure 15). In this Primal Arrangement (known also as the Celestial Order), we find *Ch'ien*, the Creative, ☰, pure *yang*, to the south and *K'un*, the Receptive, ☷, pure *yin*, to the north, positions that clearly reflect a polar model. The other six trigrams can then be understood as stages from most *yin* to most *yang* and are, in a similar way, arranged opposite each other as complementary pairs. It is evident that Fu Hsi, the symbol of the earliest formulation of Chinese wisdom, thought in terms of *yin/yang*.

It was many centuries later, in the year 1150 B.C.E., that King Wen, who is also credited with putting the *I Ching* into its present form, was leading a revolution to overthrow the Shang dynasty. Like many great revolutionaries throughout history, he was thrown into prison. There he managed to turn a problem into an opportunity and spent his days meditating on the Primal Arrangement of the trigrams.

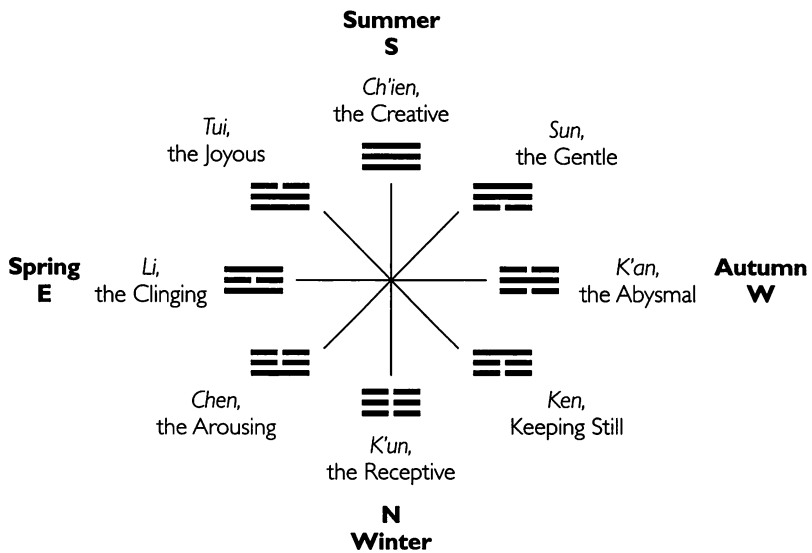


Figure 15. The Primal Arrangement of the Trigrams

In a spontaneous revelation, he discovered a new configuration, which took the trigrams out of their positions as pairs of opposites and placed them in the temporal progression in which they manifest in the cycle of the year. In this Inner-World Arrangement (also called the Terrestrial Order), the trigrams clearly symbolize the same seasonal rhythm as described in the Five Element system. When comparisons are drawn (some elements must be assigned two trigrams), we have now generated a model of *five* distinct energetic movements (Figure 16).

As we move around the circle, following the sequence according to King Wen, we find that each of the trigrams correlates to one of the Five Elements.² (To follow the discussion, you may wish to refer to the chart found on page 57.) Beginning in the east with *Chen*, the Arousing, which represents the bursting forth of activity, we move clockwise to *Sun*, the Gentle, whose image is wind and wood. Both of these trigrams relate to the renewing of the plant world, the season of spring, and to the Wood element. The next trigram, in the

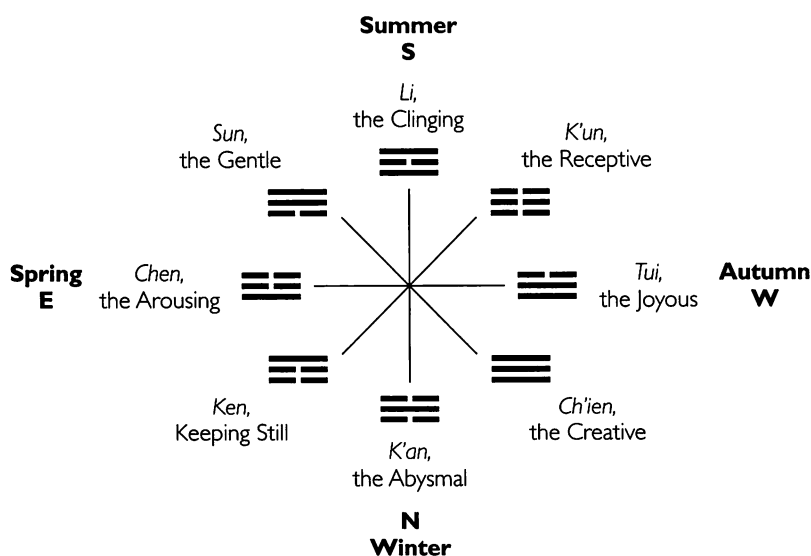


Figure 16. The Inner-World Arrangement of the Trigrams

position of the south, is *Li*, the Clinging; the image is Fire and the association is with mid-summer and the time of luxurious growth. Following in this arrangement is *K'un*, the Receptive. Here the image is Earth, the season is the harvest, and for these last two trigrams the correspondence to our Five Element model is exact. The next two trigrams express different aspects of the Metal element. In the west, we find *Tui*, the Joyous, connected with the autumn and reflecting the quality that stems from bringing the work of the year to completion. *Chi'en*, the Creative, has the image of heaven and is the father in the family; this is Metal as the Creator, the spirit that initiates all of life. We then come to *K'an*, the Abysmal, in the direction of the north, whose image is Water and season is winter. It is the time of "closing and storing," and we have another obvious comparison to one of the Five Elements. The last trigram, *Ken*, Keeping Still, is also the first, the end of one cycle and the beginning of the next in this circular pattern. This trigram can certainly be related to the element Water, as it holds in its stillness the potential for what will unfold in the coming year. *Ken* can also be seen apart from the elements, as the rest that is behind all movement. In this sense, it can be considered the *yin* counterpart that balances the *yang* activity of the other seven trigrams and, as such, is linked to the mysterious source of all creation.³

The realization by King Wen that organized the trigrams of the *I Ching* into the Inner-World Arrangement depicts the stages in the rising and falling of the vegetative life force through the course of the year. It can be understood as identical to the Law of the Five Elements and, to my knowledge, is the first formulation of this model in the history of Chinese thought. Indeed, this arrangement of the trigrams has taken Earth out of its position in the center (the Yellow River Map of Fu Hsi) and situated it between Fire and Metal, completely transforming the elemental relationships.

Through placing all of the elements on the periphery of the circle, and allowing for the *sheng* and *k'o* cycle interactions, an entirely different dynamic opens up. Here, as early as the twelfth century B.C.E., we have the origin of the Five Element system as we use it today in traditional acupuncture.



From a practical viewpoint, knowledge of the association of each trigram to one of the elements allows the *I Ching* to be approached from a Five Element perspective. Each hexagram (composed of two trigrams) can then be interpreted in terms of two elements, and the interplay of the elements involved can help decipher the meaning of that specific symbolic pattern. For example, hexagram 53, *Gradual Progress*, ䷴, discussed earlier in the description of the Wood element (found on page 88), is the image of a tree on a mountain. Comparing the upper trigram *Sun*, the Gentle, and the lower trigram *Ken*, Keeping Still, with their corresponding elements enriches our appreciation of what is meant by a development that proceeds gradually. Through interpreting the hexagram as Wood energy emerging from Water, we can see this process as growth unfolding out of an inner potential and supported by a reservoir of stillness.

Passages from the text of the *I Ching* can, in turn, clarify our understanding of the elements. Double hexagrams, in particular, composed of the same trigram repeated twice, are a valuable source of information about a single energy. An example is hexagram 2, *K'un, the Receptive*, ䷁, which can be helpful in elucidating the qualities of acceptance and devotion that are characteristic of the Earth element (see pages 102–103). Hexagram 51, *Chen, the Arousing*, ䷲, another double hexagram, symbolizes the first rising up of

Wood as it bursts forth in the springtime. This trigram expresses the *yang* side of the element, and “this movement is so violent that it arouses terror.”⁴ Contrast this with the hexagram *Pushing Upward*, ䷲, composed of the trigram *Sun*, the Gentle, within *K’un*, the Receptive (Earth element). *Sun* captures the more temperate, *yin* side of Wood, the penetrating influence that conforms to the situation and produces a steady, sustained growth, as imaged in the tree arising out of the ground:

Adapting itself to obstacles and bending around them, wood in the earth grows upward without haste and without rest. Thus too the superior [person] is devoted in character and never pauses in his progress.⁵

The distinction between the two trigrams, *Chen* and *Sun*, both associated with Wood, expands our awareness of the range of expression contained within this element and may help us fine-tune our own behavior as we face life situations that call for Wood energy.

Hexagram 50, *The Caldron*, ䷲—composed of the trigrams *Sun*, the Gentle (Wood element), below and *Li*, the Clinging (Fire), above—offers new insights into the *sheng* cycle connection of these two elements:

Here it is the wood that serves as nourishment for the flame, the spirit. All that is visible must grow beyond itself, extend into the realm of the invisible.⁶

It is through the growth and structure provided by the Wood energy that we are able to find the clarity and spirit of Fire. Taken one step further, the hexagram addresses the task of finding the fullest manifestation in life (Fire) that is based on one’s inner plan (Wood). This second interpretation played a vital role in my personal journey, as a formative shift occurred in my life in 1977 when I consulted the *I Ching* and received this hexagram. This was at a time when, after

six years of general practice, I was feeling uninspired with my work in Western medicine. The special changing line in the third place, “One is impeded in his way of life,” got my attention:

This describes a man who, in a highly evolved civilization, finds himself in a place where no one notices or recognizes him. This is a severe block to his effectiveness. All of his good qualities and gifts of mind thus needlessly go to waste. But if he will only see to it that he is possessed of something truly spiritual, the time is bound to come, sooner or later, when the difficulties will be resolved and all will go well.⁷

When interpreted in the context of the hexagram as a whole, which addresses the idea that “there is in man a fate that lends power to his life,” it was clear what was being asked of me. I intuitively understood that this fate somehow involved my connection with the spiritual traditions of ancient China, which were not, at the time, being expressed in my daily job. Recognizing the hexagram as a call to action, I phoned Dr. Fritz Smith that same day, as described in the “Introduction” (pages 1–2). Upon observing his acupuncture practice, I discovered the path that I was meant to follow.

The *I Ching*, built up in layers over many centuries, contains the foundation for all of Chinese philosophy. From an oracle handed down from antiquity and based exclusively on *yin/yang*, the Law of the Five Elements emerged as an embodiment of the principles governing the rhythm of the seasons. The richness of this classic text (and of Chinese culture in general) is, to a large degree, the result of a fertile synthesis between these two models for understanding life:

The Book of Changes contains the measure of heaven and earth; therefore it enables us to comprehend the Tao of heaven and earth and its order.⁸

NOTES

1. *I Ching*, Bollingen Series, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), "The Great Treatise," p. 338.
2. Ibid., "*Shuo Kua*," pp. 270–271. This section of the *I Ching* provides a poetic description of the inner meaning of King Wen's arrangement of the trigrams that is obviously a statement of the Five Element model.
3. According to most traditional Chinese sources, the trigram *Ken*, Keeping Still, is said to correspond with the element Earth. This reflects the fact that the stillness of *Ken* (which underlies the movement of the other trigrams) is similar to Earth as the center (around which the other elements revolve). It therefore is an association that seems to be based on the older elemental model of Fu Hsi. I have taken the liberty to associate *Ken* with Water, as this fits better with the Five Elements as we use it today.
4. *I Ching*, Hexagram 51, *Chen, the Arousing*, p. 197.
5. Ibid., Hexagram 46, *Pushing Upward*, p. 179.
6. Ibid., Hexagram 50, *The Caldron*, p. 194.
7. Ibid., Hexagram 50, *The Caldron*, p. 196.
8. Ibid., "The Great Treatise," p. 293.

CHAPTER 13

Spiritual Resources of the Five Elements

The Ancient Chinese View of the Soul

Though mountains danced before them,
they said that God was dead.¹

—Leonard Cohen

The study of language reveals a great deal about the consciousness of a society. When numerous expressions are available to describe the nuances in any given subject area, they tell us how a people spend their time. For example, the Eskimos have many words for “snow,” while in the Western world there are dozens of names for “money.” The culture of early China held a special reverence for spirituality, and an extensive vocabulary exists to express the subtleties of this invisible realm. In this chapter, we will explore several concepts from this time-honored tradition that are used to describe the world beyond the material plane.²

Connection to the spirit is such a fundamental part of Chinese philosophy that life is understood to begin the moment we receive the *shen* (usually translated in a general way as spirit) from heaven. For balance, there needs to be a link to the earth, and this is the *jing* (vital-essence), the genetic substance inherited from our parents. In

先

天

Anterior
Heaven

the sexual union between man and woman lies the physical beginning of life, but it is in the joining of the essence under the light of the *shen* that we have the origin of humans as spiritual beings. Involved as they are with the very source of being, the *shen* and *jing* belong to the province of what is termed Anterior Heaven (that which exists prior to the infant's first breath in the world). This is "the primordial endowment granted to each human at conception . . . the foundation of individual purpose . . . heaven's intent to provide an internal standard that may guide us through life."³

神

Shen

Shen, the gift of heaven, may be likened to human consciousness and is stored in the Heart, the official that holds the center and rules from a truth beyond the ego. From the perspective of the archetypal model, it is the influence of the *shen* that permits the inner Emperor to occupy the throne by divine right. This heavenly spirit is the spiritual resource of the Fire element and symbolizes clarity and light. It is said that "*shen* is the awareness that shines out of our eyes when we are truly awake"⁴ and, as such, can be observed in the spark of a person's eyes. The acupuncture point for treating the *shen* is known as *the Spirit Hall* (Bladder 39).

精

Jing

Actually, both of these primal influences can be assessed through the eyes. If the eyes are compared to an oil lamp, the flame represents the *shen*. The oil of the lamp (the physical basis for the light) corresponds to the *jing* and can be evaluated by the constancy of the gaze.⁵ *Jing* may be thought of as our inherited constitution or ancestral energy, since it contains the imprint of the generations that have come before us. Transmitted through the genes, the vital-essence provides for the long-term unfolding of individual traits. This is our potential, the material substrate that determines what can become manifest. The storehouse of the *jing* is the Kidney official.⁶ It is of course no accident that this resource is found within Water, the element that holds the seed for the entire life cycle.

Acupuncturists can address this formative aspect with the point *Gate of Destiny* (Governor Vessel 4).

These two concepts essentially describe what can be regarded as *destiny*, the greater purpose for our existence. This relationship to a spiritual dimension is woven into ancient Chinese thinking, allowing “the will of heaven to be expressed in human life.”⁷ When we add the *ch’i*, we have a construct that was mentioned earlier as “the Three Treasures.” (See page 48.) The *shen*, *jing*, and *ch’i* form a triad with the energy of life existing at the junction between heaven and earth, a perfect parallel to the model of Heaven-Earth-Man.

Within the world of Posterior Heaven (that which exists between one’s first breath and the time of death), “The ten thousand things are born from the womb of the Tao into material existence.”⁸ Here we find two aspects of the spirit level that are in fact descriptions of the human soul. *Hun*, known as the spiritual-soul, develops at birth as *jing*, our material potential, begins to move toward a nonmaterial state. This is the light *yang*-soul, and the Chinese character for *hun* contains the radical⁹ for “spirit (demon)” plus the radical for “the rising of the atmosphere,” indicating its ascending quality. The spiritual-soul is connected to the imagination and the emotions are said to be under its sway. Stored in the Liver, this is the spiritual resource of the Wood element,¹⁰ the dominion of new birth and creativity. In human life, *hun* is found in all upward movement in the direction of heaven. Transformative work, the inner alchemy that changes coarse matter into spirit, is its finest expression. From a clinical perspective, we can treat this component of the soul with the acupuncture point *the Spiritual Soul Gate* (Bladder 42).

The *yin* component of the soul is called *p’o*, the animal-soul, and develops at the moment of birth with a downward movement of the spirit toward the earth. *P’o* is created in the first breath received




Posterior
Heaven



Hun



P'o

from heaven, and the character for this image, which consists of the radical for “spirit” and the radical for “white” (the color associated with Metal), confirms that this aspect resides within the Lung official. The animal-soul governs the instincts and can be likened to a “spirited horse.”¹¹ Involvement in the world is its realm, and *p’o* is connected to all activities that have a downward direction. The action of this dark *yin*-soul ultimately produces a dependency on the external material world. The point for influencing the *p’o* is the *Animal Soul Door* (Bladder 37).

Both *hun* and *p’o* are defined by their respective movements between heaven and earth, and we may conclude that, for the ancient Chinese, the soul of man is found where *shen* and *jing* meet. To a student of the Five Elements, there is an obvious elemental correspondence for each of these spiritual resources, determined by the organs in which they are stored. To develop a framework that includes all five elements, we need only to add the association of Earth. Referred to as *yi*, the spirit of Earth is often translated as thought or intention, though study of its character reveals a meaning closer to “the spirit of empathy.” The acupuncture point that treats this energy is *Thought Dwelling* (Bladder 44). By placing *yi* in the center around which the other four expressions revolve, we have now generated an arrangement that reflects the Yellow River Map of the elements (Figure 17).

意
Yi



The spiritual implications derived from these concepts are far-reaching. They form the basis for *The Secret of the Golden Flower*,¹² the meditation text originally translated by Richard Wilhelm, which first confirmed Jung’s ideas about the reality of the inner archetypal world. (Refer to the discussion on pages 190–191.) These traditional

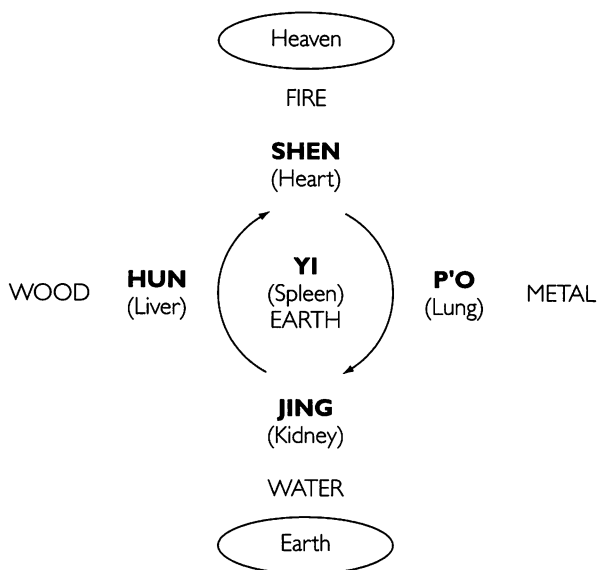


Figure 17. Movements Between Heaven & Earth / Elemental Associations

teachings describe the usual course of life as an outward-flowing process in which the *p'o*, attached to the passions, forces the *hun* into its service. With the unremitting downward movement of the energies, both aspects of the soul leak away over time and life consumes itself. Evidently, when the focus is primarily on external things, the spirit also becomes earth-bound. At death, this descending direction of the animal-soul toward the material continues. Sinking to the earth, a person's life force becomes a hungry ghost (*kuei*) in search of a body and eventually decays.

If, however, through spiritual work, there is a liberation from the world of the transitory and a detachment of the ego from "the ten thousand ensnarements,"¹³ then we can say that the energies of the *p'o* are mastered by the *hun*. This sets up an inward-flowing, rising of the life energies, which eventually can create a spiritual

center independent of bodily existence. According to ancient wisdom, to the degree that we identify with the spirit in this life, we can achieve immortality.¹⁴ As Lao Tzu says,

To be one with the Tao is to abide forever.
Such a one will be safe and whole
Even after the dissolution of his body.¹⁵

If we adopt the direction of the *hun*, i.e., the ascending movement toward heaven, as our life's task, then this principle, in the end, rules the process of dying. At that time, the *hun* is released upward as it is liberated from the body, uniting with the eternal Tao. Our diagram of these spiritual resources can now be extended to include the transformations that occur at death (Figure 18).

The contrasting movement between the ascent upward to heaven and the descent back to the earth is a recurring theme in the human drama that is expressed in many spiritual traditions. For instance, it is found in the story of Jacob's dream as told in *Genesis*. The angels, by travelling up and down on a great ladder, inform us that our action on earth influences the upper realms, while the spirit

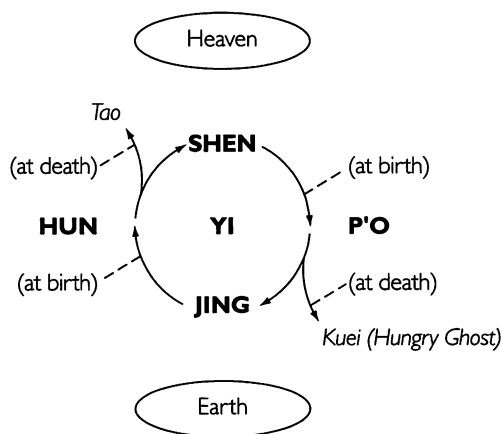



Figure 18. The Spiritual Resources at Birth & Death

from heaven continuously infuses human life. The mandala  (which consists of triangles pointing in these two directions) is used in both Judaism and Hinduism to describe this same archetypal pattern. This image, in essence, symbolizes the “individual” self aspiring to the Eternal (through the rising of the *hun*), balanced by the spirit extending into the world (through the descent of the *p’o*). A prayer said at the memorial service in the Jewish tradition captures these two tendencies at the moment of death:

The dust returns to the Earth as it was,
But the spirit returns to God who gave it.¹⁶

Thus, the spirit becomes manifest in human life, completes a cycle within this earthly plane, and then returns to the Source. A continuity therefore exists, as death can be seen as part of the natural rhythm of change.

For the Chinese of antiquity, human life is integral to the way of nature and essential for the spirit to become manifest in the world. Carl Jung expressed this same idea when he spoke of God needing humanity’s existence for completion.¹⁷ Only through our endeavors can “the higher power” realize itself and find fulfillment. Our life, though seemingly insignificant compared to the scale of the universe, from another perspective holds cosmic import. Borrowing an image from the *I Ching*, God represents the Creative principle, which acts on the invisible beginnings of all development. The human being, in this analogy, belongs to the Receptive principle and manifests the will of heaven by bringing material things to expression on the earth. (Please consult page 44.) In the Sufi tradition, Rumi says it like this:

All you are here for,
and the entire meaning of the Path of Love,
is to bring before God a heart bright as a mirror,
so God can see His own face in it.¹⁸

Indeed, it is only when a spiritual dimension is incorporated into life that a person maintains harmony with an inner truth, finds wholeness, and fulfills destiny. Upon shedding the illusion of separateness, uniting with the Infinite and experiencing oneness with all creation becomes possible. This ultimately requires either a literal death through the passing of our physical body, or a symbolic death, such as releasing attachment to the individual ego. We are then able to know the unity that was ours from the beginning. Such is the culmination of the Taoist path, to realize what the sages of old called “return to the Source”:

Attain to utmost Emptiness.
 Cling single-heartedly to interior peace.
 While all things are stirring together,
 I only contemplate the Return.¹⁹

NOTES

1. Leonard Cohen, “God is Alive, Magic is Afoot,” in *Beautiful Losers* (New York: Viking Press, 1966).
2. This chapter was originally published in *The Journal of Traditional Acupuncture*, Winter 1984–5, under the title: “Spirit, Essence, and Soul: The Taoist Spiritual Path.”
3. Lonny Jarrett, *Nourishing Destiny: The Inner Tradition of Chinese Medicine* (Stockbridge, Mass.: Spirit Path Press, 1998), p. 5.
4. Ted Kaptchuk, *The Web That Has No Weaver* (New York: Congdon and Weed, 1983), p. 45.
5. Julia Measures, Course on the officials, Watsonville, California, July 8, 1983.
6. The spiritual resource usually assigned to the Water element is *chih*, the inner will. It is treated in acupuncture with the point *Ambition Room* (Bladder 47). For the purpose of this chapter, and the focus on distinguishing between Anterior and Posterior Heaven, I have chosen to omit this aspect from the discussion.
7. Father Claude Larre, Lecture on Chinese philosophy, San Francisco, June 27, 1984.

8. Lonny Jarrett, *Nourishing Destiny: The Inner Tradition of Chinese Medicine*, p. 5.
9. Chinese characters are built of radicals, which are root images that are found in a group of related words. The meaning of a character can be deciphered by breaking it up into its composite radicals.
10. See the Associations chart on p. 80 for a list of the five “spiritual resources.”
11. Beverly Heller, Comment during a seminar by Peter Eckman, Santa Cruz, California, January 12, 1983.
12. *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, trans. Richard Wilhelm (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962). The introductory discussion of the text by Wilhelm, especially the section found on pp. 13–17, explores these concepts in detail.
13. *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, p. 46.
14. As outlined in this chapter, the struggle between the *hun* and *p'o* regards the spiritual path as a detachment from the external world and a reining in of the passions. This reflects a strong Buddhist influence. Attributed originally to a sage from the T'ang dynasty, a time when the mystical religion of Buddhism had spread to China from India and was being incorporated into practices throughout the land, *The Secret of the Golden Flower* expresses the viewpoint that spiritual enlightenment is an ebbing away of all movement, leading to peace in *nirvana*. The text is essentially an exploration of indigenous Chinese concepts with a Buddhist twist. The pure Chinese approach, true to the wisdom of *yin* and *yang*, would undoubtedly seek a more integrated understanding, where the spirit is to be found in life in the world. (See the discussion in the section on *yin/yang* found on pp. 45–46.)
15. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, trans. John Wu (New York: St. John's University Press, 1961), ch. 16, p. 23.
16. *Daily Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949), p. 602.
17. I am indebted to Wayne Souza for these ideas concerning Jung's understanding of the relationship of God and humanity.
18. Attributed to Rumi.
19. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 16, p. 21.

CHAPTER 14

The Element Within the Element *Seinfeld Revisited*

The Physician should speak of that which is invisible. What is visible should belong to his knowledge, and he should recognize the illness. . . by its symptoms. But this is far from making him a physician; he becomes a physician only when he knows that which is unnamed, invisible and immaterial, yet efficacious.¹

—Paracelsus

The sixteenth-century physician and alchemist Paracelsus was aware that, for treatment to address the root of illness, it is necessary to penetrate beneath the external manifestations to the realm of the invisible. The power of the Five Element model lies in its ability to provide a symbolic language for this hidden energy, as it presents in a particular moment. The concept of the Central Focus allows us to grasp the essence of an individual in terms of a single element and thereby find the most effective intervention. Although it may seem like the person is being pigeonholed into one of only five possible categories, on the contrary, there is actually a great deal of flexibility in this system to accommodate unique variations.

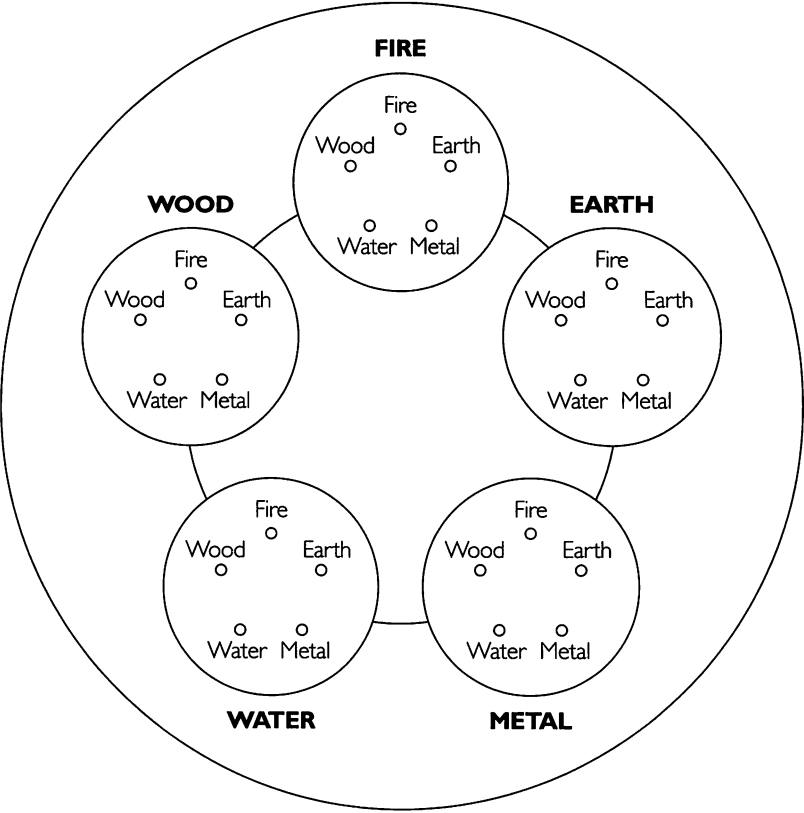


Figure 19. Five Elements Within Each Element

As we will discover in this chapter, within each element exist all of the other elements, resulting in five different expressions for each CF and a total of twenty-five identifiable patterns (Figure 19). This holographic model creates “layers within layers,” permitting more subtle distinctions to be reflected in the diagnosis. We can appreciate how this might work in the case of the physical-level disease ulcerative colitis, in which we are dealing with inflammation in the colon. In energetic terms, this condition can be interpreted as the Fire within the Metal, and assessing *the element within the element* expands our ability to accurately describe the underlying pathology.

The crucial factor, if we are to understand a person on a deeper level, is to stay open and resist the temptation to jump to a quick conclusion. By holding to the inquiry, new insights are often revealed. This open-mindedness may prove to be the single most important factor in healing, as it allows individuals to be seen for who they really are. For example, we might observe the emotion of anger and, from our study of the associations of the elements, assume that the primary imbalance must lie in Wood. Instead of rushing to the answer that seems initially obvious, through seeking to discover the motivation upon which the anger is based we can drop beneath what may prove to be only an exterior mask and uncover the true energy. Let us turn, once again, to the television series *Seinfeld*, where we find that the character with a Wood CF is not the only one who is capable of manifesting this emotion.

It is possible, in fact, to describe five kinds of anger, each quite distinct, arising from five different elemental imbalances and reflecting the qualities of each respective element. The anger of an individual with a Central Focus in Wood is perhaps the most straightforward: the person appears green, is clearly shouting, and with clenched fist and jaw becomes increasingly threatening. Physical aggression may not be far off. This pattern is illustrated by Kramer in an episode where he is upset by a violation of the rules during a game of golf. In explaining his position to Jerry, he portrays an “in-your-face” kind of anger characteristic of Wood. His statement, “Without rules, there is chaos,” demonstrates the observation that, when this element is out of balance, there exists a strong need for structure.

The anger that comes from a Fire imbalance, on the other hand, may be accompanied by a red face and is often focused around relationship issues or the need to bring clarity to a situation. This type of anger erupts suddenly like a volcano, and the tendency to abruptly flare-up literally reminds us of a fire roaring upwards. Despite the fierceness, it is an expression that is not likely to actually

become physically violent. Unlike the person with a Wood CF, who can hold onto this emotion for days, the anger of an individual whose concerns center in Fire can dissipate as quickly as it arises. We find this energy skillfully portrayed in the *Seinfeld* series by Elaine. On one occasion she becomes furious with George, who is strutting around with a newly acquired toupee. After he arrogantly pats Elaine on the nose, she explodes with the exclamation, "I don't like this thing, and here's what I'm doing with it!" Once she throws the hairpiece out the window, we observe that a smile has returned to her face. As is typical of a Fire anger, Elaine's comes on like an explosion and, once released, she is ready to move on.

We can recognize an anger that arises from the Earth element by the fact that the person is upset simply because no one seems to understand how hard life is for him. Basically, this emotional display is a cry for sympathy: Hey, what about me? Take care of me. Jerry exhibits this type of anger in a show in which Kramer takes a new job that reduces his time to socialize. When he finally returns from a long day at the office, we find Jerry sitting in the dark, sulking and upset. As an enactment of his anger, he throws take-out chicken into the trash. Jerry's comment, "I ordered in, but it's still work," is obviously an appeal for the attention he craves. Once Kramer is willing to set aside his tasks and hang out with his friend, Jerry's anger abates. Though we do expect an Earth anger to resolve once the individual receives sympathy, it must be remembered that for some who exhibit this classic pattern of "poor me," no amount of care and concern would ever be enough.

An anger that has its source in Metal has an entirely different quality: cold, cutting, dismissive, and, at times, quite vicious. Underlying the emotion is the message, It's all meaningless bullshit, so why should I have any interest in you? This manifestation of anger is based on the fact that, as a result of not being in touch with spirit,

a person with a CF in this element may feel empty inside and does not see value in anything. It is an elemental expression that can be recognized when, cut off without reason, we become aware that another person is making the assumption that we are, in our very essence, worthless. There may be an initial tendency to take this rejection personally, but it soon becomes obvious that due to an imbalance in Metal, this attitude is being projected onto everyone. Though Metal is not one of the predominant elements among the four *Seinfeld* protagonists, we do find this type of anger enacted in one episode when a chest of drawers is stolen, despite the fact that Kramer is guarding it. The cold, calculating tone with which the thief says, "I can hurt you," completely unnerves Kramer, reflecting the way Metal overcomes Wood across the *k'o* cycle.

Finally, the anger that originates from the Water element can be powerful and ferocious, yet, if confronted, will typically subside. This is the energy of the bully, for instance, who puts on a show of bravado in order to cover up the scared child inside. Since fear is the driving force in a person with a CF in Water, this anger is basically a facade and tends to disintegrate (often with tears) when tested. In seeking to sort out elemental imbalances, it is useful to know that the person with a Wood anger characteristically won't back down when confronted and is capable of striking out, while the individual with a Water CF will likely crumble. This is one way (though potentially painful to the examiner) to distinguish between these two elements. George demonstrates this particular emotion during one scene when a dog bites Elaine and its owner takes no responsibility. Overcoming his natural impulse to run, we find George announcing defiantly, "He just walked away, and once again I'm standing here like a little man. Well not this time." Of course, George is ineffective in his pursuit of the perpetrator and, before too long, returns from his mission teary-eyed and defeated.

In all of these illustrations, anger is the obvious presentation; however, when we discover the real roots from which this emotion emanates, it becomes clear that we are dealing with five separate energetic patterns. Although a more superficial analysis would observe anger and conclude that the imbalance must therefore stem from Wood, once we truly understand the essence of the person involved, we may be led to any of the elements. If anger is the predominant way an individual with a Metal imbalance, for example, expresses her experience of a deep emptiness inside, then we can say that the diagnosis, on the level of the element within the element, is the Wood within the Metal. The Central Focus is the Metal element, which suggests that the core issues revolve around finding meaning and spirit, while the way the elemental disturbance manifests itself in this case is through anger, making Wood *the element within*.² We can appreciate the power of this method to penetrate the *persona* (mask) that is presented to the outside and reveal the dynamic that lies underneath. It is also apparent that, unless we are able to recognize the more fundamental energy, it is easy to mistake the element within for the element of the CF.³

CASE HISTORY: I treated a policeman who had a particularly loud, aggressive manner for sinus headaches. When it was time for him to lie down on the table to receive acupuncture, he would methodically remove the revolver strapped to his leg. I assumed that his angry stance reflected a Wood imbalance, but after three sessions it was clear that he was not responding to treatment. His headache was no better and, more importantly, there was no change in his energy or how he felt inside. When he happened to mention some fleeting chest pain, I seized the opportunity to test his emotions and, mustering up a groan in my own voice, asked, "What if it's your heart?" The depth of the fear that was revealed made it evident that his CF, in fact, resided

in the Water element. His entire persona, with all the unmistakable characteristics of Wood, was a front that was compensating for the frightened little boy at the center of his personality. The correct diagnosis, in Five Element terms, was the Wood within the Water. This distinction had real practical value and, once I switched the focus of the therapeutic intervention to the Water element, tending to the fear that was the real source of his imbalance, he appeared visibly more at ease during our sessions.⁴ As he gradually let go of the facade that he was showing the world (at least in the treatment room), we began to make some real progress in our work together.



So we can see that the element within serves to qualify the Central Focus, describing how the primary imbalance expresses itself. At first glance, we may take this manifestation to be the CF; only through getting to know the individual—and observing the predominant color, sound, emotion, and odor—can we uncover his essential nature. The question we want to remember to ask is, What does this presenting sign or symptom rest on? Depression, for example, can also arise from any of the elements, and we do not want to automatically assume that it represents the grief of Metal. The depression of Wood reflects the fact that nothing is growing in a person's life; a Fire CF may be exhibiting a lack of joy or dealing with the sadness of a failed relationship; an individual with an Earth imbalance can be down due to the feeling that no one supports him; and the depression of Water is often inseparable from the pervasive bodily fatigue that is a symptom of a depletion in reserves.

Likewise, laughter, if inappropriate, is frequently a great mask, and an appreciation of its nuances can be most revealing. The laughter associated with the Fire element is genuine and conveys a

real joy. We can recognize this expression by its contagiousness, which invites us to join in. It stands in contrast to the laughter that originates from an imbalance in Wood, where humor becomes a vehicle for anger and a way to attack others. Common among certain comedians known for their aggression, a Wood laughter has a very different feel to it. When faced with this energy, if I trust my inner feelings, I prefer to move away. An Earth laughter is motivated by sympathy and has no body to it. You can recognize it when someone tells a bad joke at a party: the Earth person will force a laugh because he feels sorry for the person who has just embarrassed himself. The laughter that stems from the Metal element, on the other hand, has an empty quality and, rather than drawing us in, seems to leave us summarily cut off. Lastly, a Water laugh, since it is used as a means to cover up fear, is nervous and uneasy. By not assuming that all laughter arises from Fire, and exploring which element lies at its source, this sound can be used as a key to unlock the individual's true energetic dynamic.

As with the Central Focus, we may be able to trace the origins of the element within to early events in a person's life, particularly to the family history. How the disturbance initially occurred may be linked to how the imbalance is brought forth in the current moment. If the cause of feelings of worthlessness and lack of meaning was the presence of anger in the home, then we might find the elemental disharmony to be the Wood within the Metal. It would then follow that a Metal anger may become the way the CF in Metal manifests in the world.

Another way to come to know the element within is by observing how someone deals with her dominant imbalance, essentially the way a person fills her deepest needs. We have seen that issues in the Earth often lead to becoming a health care provider. Of course, not every caregiver is motivated by this element. An

individual with a Metal CF might seek to deal with her lack of connection to spirit through also adopting nurturing behavior. Earth within the Metal would then probably best describe this expression, and giving to others becomes the ultimate source of meaning in life. Due to the low self-esteem associated with the Metal element, a person with this specific energy may be prone to ignoring her own self and easily slip into the tendency, common among caregivers, of becoming a martyr.

Because the impulse to compensate for the dysfunction in our central element can be so powerful, this pattern is typically at the root of addictions. Cigarette smoking can be seen as a way to bring warmth to the lungs in order to support a cold Metal element and may be driven by the urge to support the Fire within the Metal element. Similarly, the sex addict (described on page 131), who seeks to fill the void inside through compulsive sexual acting out, may have this same diagnosis. Woody Allen, especially in his later movies, portrays himself as seeking meaning through relationships, and I would interpret his actions as indicative of an imbalance in the Fire within Metal.⁵ Obviously, until the underlying need is addressed, it is unlikely that any intervention to control the addictive behavior will be successful.

The element within the element is, in essence, an expansion of our Five Element map that allows us to speak of five kinds of disharmonies within each element. As we explore the many variations that exist, we find that this framework helps elucidate the nature of the central element that is out of balance. Thus, if the primary issue for a person is growth and the CF lies in Wood, there are five potential energetic configurations that can be described. If there is no spark to the growth, no joy in new endeavors, the element within the element may be the Fire in the Wood. If the growth is unstable, like a tree not rooted in the ground, the problem can be seen as the Earth

within the Wood. A lack of quality or meaning in the tasks of life points to an imbalance that arises from the Metal in the Wood. A failure to grow coupled with rigidity, in which the tree seems to be drying up, may indicate depletion of the Water within the Wood. And the situation of lack of growth purely as a reflection of a Wood CF can be thought of as the Wood within the Wood. Thus, we find that each element has all of the other elements residing within it and depends on all of them to function optimally.

Understanding the nature of the elemental imbalance within an element may be valuable in accurately identifying specific life situations. For instance, it is quite easy for the Metal element, in pursuit of spiritual meaning, to become cold and aloof, bereft of human contact. Through our model we can describe this tendency as a lack of Fire in the Metal. This expression of Metal can be found in all religions; one example occurs in the ancient teachings of India, where an awareness of the *Atman*, the transcendent and eternal inner spirit, permeates Hindu philosophy:

In the beginnings of things, they are unmanifest,
In their middles, manifest,
And in their ends, again unmanifest.
What is there in this for grief?⁶

This statement may be valid and is certainly very wise; yet, in dealing with human suffering, the detachment upon which these words are based may leave us alone and isolated in our pain. For healing to occur, there is a need for the compassion that can only come from touching the heart of another, and this is the influence of the Fire element.

The absence of Fire within the Metal may lead to judgments that are dismissive of others and a rigidity that prevents a person from flowing. This dynamic may be observed among devotees of

any tradition, especially when they become too serious in their quest and austere in their practices. It is an energy that, unfortunately, is quite common within many religious institutions and lies at the root of fundamentalisms—recognized whenever views become dogmatic and result in conflict between peoples, rather than in a sense of our common humanity.⁷ We might even notice this coldness occurring on our own individual spiritual path, when the rituals simply lose their joy. Becoming aware of this interplay of the elements reminds us to lighten up and laugh at our own struggles, to stay connected to others despite their imperfections, and in this way bring the glow of Fire to the tasks of Metal. The integration of these two elements embodies the teaching, emphasized in Zen Buddhism, to find the spirit in the human world and in everyday life.

In acupuncture, this balancing effect can be accomplished through treating the Fire point on the Lung meridian (Lung 10), which allows the search for meaning to be more in touch with warmth and joy. It is no accident that the Heart official, the higher self and center of our being, resides in Fire. The implication is that, true to this element, the empire (both within and without) is to be led with love and compassion. Residing as *the Sun King*, this minister needs to draw upon a genuine connection to others, rather than come from the pure essence of Metal, which when devoid of Fire can lack relatedness and feeling.

Up until this chapter, we have discussed the elements and officials as separate functions, working together through their *sheng* and *k'o* cycle connections. Diagnosing an element within another element stretches our thinking, allowing us to describe the interdependence of the energies and to honor the subtleties in how they are expressed. We certainly want to approach this added level of complexity with caution, and it is quite permissible for beginning

students as well as for seasoned practitioners to stay with the more simple strategy of seeing the elements as distinct entities that are in relationship to each other. Unless we can first determine the central element, working on this level has the very real possibility of confounding the picture.⁸

This same process can be applied to the model of the Jungian archetypes as well. We can understand these primal images as separate potentials that support each other for health and wholeness, or we can see the archetypes as existing within each other in much the same way as we have explored the elements within. Thus, the Warrior can be said to have a Sage within that brings wisdom to the tasks at hand; the Lover within the Warrior is needed for there to be joy in the work; the King within the Warrior provides calmness and a heavenly purpose to all that is undertaken; and the Queen holds the qualities of mercy and compassion within the Warrior's endeavors. This way of describing a hierarchy of *energies within energies* appears in other archetypal systems, with similar enrichment and possible confusion.⁹

In closing, we return to the *Seinfeld* sitcom, where there are many scenes that brilliantly capture the dance of the elements. During a trip to the Hamptons, George is seen naked by Jerry's girlfriend while he is changing his clothes after a swim in the pool. The water being cold, he had at that moment "significant shrinkage" and feels that he has been "short-changed." In the words of Jerry, his genitals behaved "like a frightened turtle." George is certain that the woman has gotten the wrong idea and he is terrified at the prospect that she will share her impression with his date. Unable to contain his agitation, he obsessively returns to the topic over dinner, which directly results in the dreaded information being shared and leads to the very humiliation he most wants to avoid. There is no doubt that

George is driven by fear and that his core issues revolve around his Central Focus in Water. He portrays the situation that occurs when this element has no connection to inner calmness, along with the disastrous consequences that inevitably follow.

The inability to contain fear, and then acting in just the way that is bound to bring calamities upon oneself, is a common human reaction. To discern the archetypal dynamics, let us turn once again to the *I Ching*:

One is faced with a danger that has to be overcome. Weakness and impatience can do nothing. Only a strong person can stand up to his fate, for his inner security enables him to endure to the end. It is only when we have the courage to face things exactly as they are that a light will develop out of events, by which the path to success may be recognized. . . . Strength in the face of danger does not plunge ahead but bides its time, whereas weakness in the face of danger grows agitated and has not the patience to wait.¹⁰

This passage is from the hexagram *Waiting*, ䷟, composed of the trigrams *Ch'ien*, the Creative (heaven), below and *K'an*, the Abysmal (water), above. In Five Element terms, the Metal within the Water is being described here.¹¹ The *I Ching* teaching is informing us that, in order to remain calm when danger arises, we need the support of the spirit inside. George's primary elemental imbalance is a lack of Metal within Water and, as a result, there is no way for him to find the strength to deal with a frightening situation. The concept of the element within the element allows us to penetrate into the driving force behind human behavior and, as an added bonus, enhances our appreciation of this *Seinfeld* episode. In addition, this more complex level of energetic interactions brings new insight to the interpretation of ancient texts, so that their wisdom can be applied in our lives.¹²

NOTES

1. Paracelsus. A portion of this quotation is included in the website, www.barrettdorko.com.
2. Of course, a person with a Metal CF can express any of the emotions, and each might manifest with the qualities of the Metal element. It is only when one emerges as the overriding pattern that we would diagnose it to be the element within.
3. Once we have identified the two elements involved, it is somewhat arbitrary which is considered within the other. It can be argued that, in these examples of five kinds of anger, Wood is the presenting energy and should be taken as the first level. The element of the Central Focus, upon which the anger rests, would then be the element within. I have chosen, instead, to follow the teachings of J. R. Worsley, who considered finding the CF to be the critical factor and took that element as primary. How this central element expresses itself (the emotion of anger in this discussion) determines the element within (here, it is Wood). The important thing, to avoid confusion, is to be consistent in our analysis.
4. As described in chapter 11, "Resolving Emotional Imbalances," it was helpful, in this case, to look to the *k'o* cycle to control the emotion that was excessive. Just as the levies hold the river in check, by treating the Earth element the fear arising from the Central Focus in Water was able to be brought into balance.
5. The character portrayed by Woody Allen in the movie *Stardust Memories* is a classic portrayal of a Metal CF who is searching for a way to overcome feelings of inadequacy through sexual acting out. His repeated experiences of "empty sex" provide us with a tragic picture of an addiction to the Fire of sexuality as an expression of an imbalance in the Metal element, i.e., looking for love in a futile effort to fill the void inside.
6. "The Vedas," in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
7. As Jung once said, "The greatest obstacle to religious experience is organized religion."
8. Professor J. R. Worsley, who is the acknowledged master of subtle energetic diagnosis, routinely described a third element within: *the element within the element within the element*. This is the deepest imbalance upon which the energy rests. Most of his students, myself

included, have not acquired the degree of discernment necessary to work on this level.

9. In the Kabbalah, the mystical tradition within Judaism, the archetypal emanations of God are known as the *Sefirot* and organized on the Tree of Life. During the period between the holidays of Passover and Shavuot, there is a tradition of spending one full week focusing on each of seven of these qualities and observing how all seven are expressed *within* that particular *Sefirot* for the successive days of that week. Since there are seven within seven, the ritual of “counting the Omer” lasts forty-nine days. This process is obviously very similar to describing the element within the element. For example, the first week is *Chesed*, usually translated as merciful kindness. On the first day we have the pure state of *Chesed* within *Chesed*; the next day brings *Gevurah* within *Chesed*, symbolizing the ability to set a boundary or limit within this merciful kindness, and so on. If we wish to compare models, this second pattern would be analogous to the Wood within the Earth in the Five Element tradition, or the Warrior within the Queen in the system of the Jungian archetypes. Further exploration of these systems and comparisons between them is beyond the scope of our discussion (and may well turn out to be material for another book).
10. *I Ching*, Bollingen Series, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), Hexagram 5, *Waiting*, p. 24.
11. Refer to chapter 12, “Origins of the Five Element Model,” pp. 239–240. The Inner-World arrangement of the trigrams allows us to understand the elemental association for each hexagram of the *I Ching*. As mentioned earlier, the lower trigram is seen to be *within* the upper one.
12. Many of the insights in this chapter evolved from conversations with Bill Mueller during a seminar conducted by J. R. Worsley in Tucson, Arizona in 1987.

CHAPTER 15

Conclusion

Enriching Our Lives with Archetypal Symbols

Marvel and accept and imitate,
But leave mystery to mystery.¹

—*Lakota Sioux saying*

CASE HISTORY: I shall never forget a most instructive case history that dates back to the time when I first began integrating acupuncture into my medical practice. A young man came to my office complaining of low back pain that was especially disconcerting since he was about to embark on a camping trip to Mexico. Hearing a groaning voice, and knowing that symptoms in this area of the body frequently involved the Bladder meridian, I learned that, yes, he was indeed quite fearful because of the limitation in movement that he was experiencing. When I probed further into the patient's constellation of symptoms, I discovered that over the last month he was urinating more frequently and was, in fact, getting up six times during the night. That was the piece of information I was looking for to confirm a Central Focus in the Water element.

As I prepared to treat him with needles, I fortunately had the thought that I ought to check his urine for sugar. When the result was strongly positive, and a follow-up blood test revealed a glucose of 750, I knew that we were dealing with the acute onset of diabetes. This patient needed treatment with insulin, not with acupuncture! In my eagerness to arrive at a Five Element diagnosis, I had nearly

missed a life-threatening medical condition. At that moment I received a profound lesson in balance and in valuing both the Western scientific and Eastern energetic systems of medicine. The teaching was made even more poignant by the fact that this man was headed for rural Mexico, not the best place to develop diabetic coma.

One way to think about the relative effectiveness of the different medical models is to see the approach based on biological science as basically *external*, applying remedies from the outside, such as the injection of insulin in the above case. Chinese medicine, on the other hand, seeks to harmonize the *ch'i* that underlies our *body/mind/spirit* and is particularly well suited for *internal* conditions related to stress, emotions, and lifestyle, as well as for functional disorders that elude available tests. In the area of infectious disease, for instance, where the conventional Western practice is to prescribe antibiotics that attack the invading organism from without, acupuncture and herbs focus on building the immune system from within. If the problem is one of acute pneumonia, it may be life-saving to direct treatment to the eradication of the bacteria. To deal effectively with a person who is suffering repeated bouts of infection, however, the underlying dysfunction in the body's defenses must be addressed, and here Eastern methods may be more appropriate. Certainly, each system has a role to play.

This distinction goes beyond the realm of medicine, reflecting a fundamental cultural bias. Carl Jung, in his essay, "The Difference between Eastern and Western Thinking," describes the Western world as primarily extroverted. From this perspective, all good is found without, and even God exists outside ourselves. The Eastern way, in contrast, is introverted; the answer lies within, and God is realized on the inside. In the West, achievement and activity are everything. In the East, the truth is expressed in *being*. Jung

understood that either approach, in its extreme, tends to be one-sided and, when the other is not taken into account, neglects half of the universe. Here is another example of *yin* and *yang*: each viewpoint is incomplete in itself and both are needed for wholeness. Likewise, Eastern or Western medicine alone only attends to half of the individual. If we are to treat both the inner and outer person, we must bring together these two worlds of medicine.

One cautionary note: Westerners who explore healing methods and spiritual practices that originate in Asia are faced with a certain paradox. If our intention is to merely copy the East, ignoring our own heritage in the process, we once more succumb to the tendency, so prevalent in the West, to seek the answer out there. Searching for the truth in this external way, we miss the essential message of these teachings, which is to stop our incessant searching and look inside. Jung warns us on this point:

If we snatch these things directly from the East, we have merely indulged our Western acquisitiveness, confirming yet again that everything good is outside, whence it has to be fetched and pumped into our barren souls.²

To become imitators of the East dooms us to fail miserably. Rather, in this global age, we must build upon a foundation in Western culture and use other traditions to create a new synthesis. As Jung suggests, “We must get at the Eastern values from within and not from without, seeking them in ourselves, in the unconscious.”³ Through the basic premise developed in this book—that the elements and officials of Chinese medicine are essentially archetypes of the collective unconscious—we have a language for describing these models in universal images familiar to all people. This allows us to approach Eastern medicine from an inner direction, uncovering the energies in ourselves and observing them in the world around us.

I personally received a valuable teaching in this arena from my oldest daughter when she was just seven years old. This was at a time when, fresh from my acupuncture training, I was enamored with Asian culture. One day, as I was practicing *T'ai Ch'i* in my black slippers, she came up to me, shook her head, and remarked simply, "Dad, you know you'll never be Chinese!" As she walked away, I could not deny her penetrating perception. Her words became an important reminder to keep my balance and remain true to my roots. The goal is to enrich, not replace, who we are. Though the teachings of the East offer a vital source of wisdom, there is no escaping the unique destiny that each of us inherits from our particular ancestry.



When illness occurs, especially in the modern world, it often can be seen as a compensation for the neglected sides of life—intimate relationship, fulfillment at work, a sense of meaning, spiritual peace—and conventional medicine finds itself at a loss because these qualities defy scientific measurement. One consequence of the obsessive accumulation of information and material goods is a loss of contact with the vital energies of the psyche. We have, in effect, become prisoners of our technological achievements. The person who is a product of this current age has generally become too sophisticated to give thanks to a power greater than himself or to value spiritual pursuits. Approaching life exclusively through the rational mind, he is cut off from a crucial aspect of what it means to be human. Indeed, when we permit our lives to become dominated by logic and science there is an inevitable separation from nature, and from our inner nature, that leaves man's deepest needs unfulfilled. In many cases, this alienation is the forerunner of disease.

Undeniably, concerns about individual health are inextricably connected to the health of the wider community—and of the earth itself. When we disregard the laws of the natural world, deterioration of the environment and the extinction of species are bound to follow. This, in turn, has a deleterious effect on general well-being, as pollution and global warming impact us all. In a society where the economic structure is largely motivated by greed, efforts to care for others and build a harmonious world must be undertaken in spite of dominant cultural values that often do not see beyond personal gain. When access to health care, which ought to be a universal right, is driven by the profit motive, it becomes unavailable to those who cannot afford it. We may proclaim the triumph of world capitalism but, if we destroy the planet in our pursuit of progress and mass consumption, it can hardly be deemed a victory.

To counter the one-sidedness of our time, we need to find another way of being, one that invites a relationship with the archetypal realm and the world of symbols. Throughout history, people have shared myths as a way to bring meaningful images into their lives, images that can effectively enhance their awareness of the internal energies that have been the subject of these pages. Jung said it like this:

The more the critical reason dominates, the more impoverished life becomes; but the more of the unconscious, and the more of myth we are capable of making conscious, the more of life we integrate. Over-valued reason has this in common with political absolutism: under its dominion the individual is pauperized.⁴

Sadly, contemporary man has become “so tied to the external world that he is incapable of seeing the spiritual content of his own inner world.”⁵ Though the word *myth* is usually interpreted to mean “falsehood,” and the stories may not be literally true on the outside,

when understood as a description of energies on the inside we realize that they resonate with meaning. In fairy tales, the dragon that is to be overcome is meant to symbolize our own inner demon. There is a lost world to be rediscovered, the world of dreams, wonder, creativity, and “the Great Mystery that is.”⁶ We desperately need to reestablish contact with these “first things of life,”⁷ the very things that the dominant paradigm of our age puts last.

Myth and ritual share an intimate connection. It has been said, “Myth is the telling of ritual and ritual is the enactment of myth.”⁸ Following Jung’s admonition to stay true to our own traditions, we find that Western culture provides a fertile treasure-chest of ways to explore the potentials of the unconscious from both within and without. For example, the myth of creation, as related in *Genesis*, tells us that even God rested after six days of labor. When we honor the commandment to observe the ritual of the Sabbath, we are bringing an ancient story alive and imbuing ourselves with its wisdom. A day of rest allows us to complement incessant activity with stillness, replenish inner reserves, reconnect with family and friends, get out into nature, and basically restore quality to life. Through acknowledging the source of all being, we can gain perspective and find our proper place in the scheme of things. On the planetary scale, a Sabbath day permits the earth’s resources to be renewed. Here is a practice that brings a harmony of *yin* and *yang*, allowing Eastern teachings of balance to be implemented in a form that is consistent with our Western heritage. Since the Age of Reason, people have scoffed at such traditions, and the price in human suffering and loss of meaning is apparent everywhere.

Yet, as we contemplate what it means to live a life close to myth and ritual, it is clear that we cannot simply reappropriate the beliefs of former times in a literal way. Though ancient traditions are rich in archetypal imagery and have much to teach modernity, it does

not work to ignore the tools of technology. Any movement toward embracing the world of symbols must be inclusive of all that has come before. The goal is to forge a synthesis of old and new, of East and West, of ancient models of energy and the cutting-edge discoveries of science. And we certainly can no longer afford to see a single point of view as “the right way.” The world has grown far too small for fundamentalisms. By learning to think symbolically, we can avoid the concrete interpretations of religious texts that have been so disastrous over the ages. It is then possible to accept all traditions as different paths to the same perennial truth. Jerusalem is not meant to be a piece of real estate to fight over, but a symbol of a spiritual home that exists within every one of us.

Incorporating archetypes into our lives provides a richness to human experience, countering the constriction of consciousness that occurs when the rational mind claims to be the only way of knowing. According to Jung,

Besides [the working of the intellect] there is a thinking in primordial images, in symbols which are older than the historical man, which are inborn in him from the earliest times, and, eternally living, outlasting all generations, still make up the groundwork of the human psyche. It is only possible to live the fullest life when we are in harmony with these symbols; wisdom is a return to them. It is a question neither of belief nor of knowledge, but of the agreement of our thinking with the primordial images of the unconscious.⁹

Here is where the wisdom of ancient China can serve as a resource to treat the disharmony of modern life. Throughout this book, we have explored the recognition that acupuncture is built upon a foundation of archetypes, derived from observing how things unfold in nature, patterns that are as true today as they were at the dawn of civilization. The elements and officials put us in touch with universal images that allow us to describe the movement of life’s energies

in a practical and cohesive way. Since human life is seen to be an extension of these same principles, the timeless truths identified in ages past can be readily applied to our condition. The genius of this approach lies in the way the model can inform everything from cooking a meal to building a house, from organizing society to the practice of medicine.

The Law of the Five Elements provides a map for cultivating a life that resonates with enduring values. Through incorporating the energies of the seasons into our daily routine, we can return to “primordial images,” the archetypes that Jung suggests are the substrate for living “the fullest life.” The elements essentially serve as symbols to inspire the journey. From Wood we experience the energy of creation and, like the world in the springtime, are encouraged to give birth to new possibilities and find the attributes that permit them to grow. Fire teaches us of warmth and love and the value of relationship, and we realize that we, too, have the potential to become a source of sunshine, both within and without. The Earth element reminds us to nurture others as well as ourselves, to bring things to fruition—and not forget to put our hands in the soil. Metal points to the spirit, the realm of the invisible, and brings the letting go and receptivity that is essential for there to be meaning and quality in life. Finally, from the Water element we learn to flow with changes and understand the importance of rest and filling the reservoirs. Furthermore, the cyclic aspect of the elements teaches us of wholeness and the interconnection of all things, and it encourages faith in the endless circle of life. No matter how dark the winter, in time there will be a spring. To participate in an *elemental life* is to embody the wisdom of indigenous, earth-based cultures, where the value of imitating the natural world is considered a central teaching.

Ultimately, the model of the elements can best be used as a tool for increased awareness. One of the great gifts of Chinese medicine

is the way this system teaches us to look behind the content and recognize the energy of the moment. Once we discern the underlying pattern, the emphasis is always on applying this expanded insight in a way that brings life into harmony with the demands of the time. This allows the most effective intervention to deal with the root of any dis-ease. Through treating a condition at the energetic stage, before it manifests in physical illness, the Chinese method can also excel in preventive medicine. By attending to the inner world, honoring the reality of *ch'i* and the archetypes that are the building blocks of the unconscious, Eastern medicine is a perfect complement to the extroverted, Western scientific way of thinking.

These symbols offer a path to a more authentic, fulfilled self. By using the elements as a guide, we may be able to discover a way out of the pervasive alienation that characterizes the world today and restore a sense of balance to our lives. If we can only rise above the hubris that would claim that the human mind has all the answers, the opportunity exists to return to images that are especially powerful because they reflect the rhythms of the earth. Walt Whitman expressed many of these same sentiments in his “Song of the Open Road”:

Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons,
It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth. . . .
Wisdom is of the soul, is not susceptible of proof, is its own proof. . . .
Now I re-examine philosophies and religions,
They may prove well in lecture-rooms, yet not prove at all
Under the spacious clouds and along the landscape and flowing
currents.¹⁰

In essence, we can learn to stay healthy by following the laws of nature.

Symbols can be seen to serve as an invisible force that links the soul back to the source of all creation. Our contemporary age suffers

gravely from a “loss of soul”—a condition that was recognized by traditional cultures as the ultimate calamity. What is being called for is a spiritual perspective, a worldview that transcends the limitations of the individual ego and the ultimate lack of meaning inherent in a lifestyle centered on materialism. The *I Ching* encourages us in this same direction:

Religious forces are needed to overcome the egotism that divides men. . . . The hearts of men must be seized by a devout emotion . . . a religious awe in the face of eternity.¹¹

We need to return to a more simple, natural way of being, one that supports a more conscious existence on the planet. The prescription for survival in our times may be found in ancient Chinese wisdom: “See the simple and embrace the primal, diminish the self and curb the desires!”¹²

Honoring the sacred dimension of all people, a by-product of appreciating the collective unconscious, is the surest cure for the epidemic of violence so rampant in the modern world. Though the news is inundated with examples of the human capacity for destruction, we can take heart in the fact that we already possess the energetic potentials that can be accessed in a way that serves the greater good and brings people together. As Rumi pointed out many centuries ago,

The news we hear is full of grief for that future,
but the real news inside here
is there’s no news at all.¹³

Only by developing a connection to the realm of the mythic and things that are eternal can there be peace within and without.

Jung once said, “If the archetypal situation underlying the illness can be expressed in the right way, the patient is cured.”¹⁴ The

system of the Five Elements is, in a very real way, a vital resource for such an expression. Whether serving as the foundation for an acupuncture treatment, found in poetry, or used as a means to deepen our understanding of the energies of life itself, the elemental model permits us to gain a universal perspective on our limited human situation. And, in a culture so deprived of meaningful myths and rituals, the images handed down from the ancient Chinese provide a timeless spiritual dimension to enrich our lives.

NOTES

1. Ruth Beebe Hill, *Hanta Yo: An American Saga* (New York: Warner Books, 1979).
2. C. G. Jung, "The Difference Between Eastern and Western Thinking," in *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 490.
3. Ibid., p. 490.
4. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 302.
5. Laurens van der Post, *The Heart of the Hunter* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1961), p. 145.
6. Rumi, *Open Secret*, versions by John Moyne and Coleman Barks (Vermont: Threshold Books, 1984), p. 21.
7. Laurens van der Post, *The Heart of the Hunter*, p. 134.
8. Michael Meade, Men's Conference, San Francisco, 1989.
9. C. G. Jung, "The Stages of Life," in *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell, p. 21.
10. Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1992), pp. 152-153.
11. *I Ching*, Bollingen Series, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), Hexagram 59, *Dispersion*, pp. 227-228.
12. Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, trans. John Wu (New York: St. John's University Press, 1961), ch. 19, p. 25.
13. Rumi, *Open Secret*, p. 34.
14. C. G. Jung, *Analytical Psychology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 116.
15. Rumi, *We Are Three*, trans. Coleman Barks (Georgia: Maypop Books, 1987), p. 44.



Tao

When you do things from your soul,
you feel a river moving in you, a joy.
When actions come from another section,
the feeling disappears.
Don't let others lead you.
They may be blind, or worse, vultures.
Reach for the rope of God.¹⁵

—Rumi

Appendix

Romanization Equivalents

This appendix presents romanized versions in both the Wade-Giles and Pinyin systems, for the Chinese words found in this book. In addition, translations are provided for key concepts and texts, and for the *I Ching* trigrams.

Table I. CHINESE CONCEPTS AND CLASSIC TEXTS

Wade-Giles	Pinyin	Translation
Ch'i	Qi	Vital Energy, Life Force
Ch'i Kung	Qi Gong	Internal exercises for cultivating energy
Chih	Zhi	Human Will (stored in the Kidney)
Chou	Zhou	Chinese Dynasty from 1030 to 221 B.C.E.
Feng Shui	Feng Shui	Chinese art of designing a harmonious environment
Fu	Fu	Hollow organs of the <i>Yang</i> officials
Hun	Hun	Spiritual Soul, <i>Yang</i> -Soul (stored in the Liver)
I Ching	Yi Jing	The Book of Changes
Jen	Ren	Man
Jing	Jing	Vital-Essence, Genetic Potential (stored in the Kidney)
K'o	Ke	Control (cycle of the Five Elements)
Kuei	Gui	Hungry Ghost, Demon
Nei Ching Su Wen	Nei Jing Su Wen	The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine
P'o	Po	Animal Soul, <i>Yin</i> -Soul (stored in the Lung)
Shen	Shen	Heavenly Spirit (stored in the Heart)
Sheng	Sheng	Creative (cycle of the Five Elements)
T'ai Chi Ch'uan	Tai Ji Chuan	Great Ultimate Boxing, Chinese Internal Martial Art
T'ang	Tang	Chinese Dynasty from 618 to 906 C.E.
Tao	Dao	The Way
Tao Teh Ching	Dao De Jing	The Classic of the Way and Virtue
Ti	Di	Earth (the planet)
T'ien	Tian	Heaven
Tsang	Zang	Solid organs of the <i>Yin</i> officials
Wu Hsing	Wu Xing	The Five Elements
Wu Wei	Wu Wei	Non-Doing, Action in harmony with the Tao
Yi	Yi	Thought, Intention, Empathy (stored in the Spleen)

Table 2. TRIGRAMS OF THE I CHING

Wade-Giles	Pinyin	Translation	Image
Ch'ien	Qian	The Creative	Heaven
K'un	Kun	The Receptive	Earth
Chen	Zhen	The Arousing	Thunder
K'an	Kan	The Abysmal	Water
Ken	Gen	Keeping Still	Mountain
Sun	Sun	The Gentle	Wind, Wood
Li	Li	The Clinging	Fire
Tui	Dui	The Joyous	Lake

Table 3. NAMES OF SAGES FROM ANCIENT CHINA

Wade-Giles	Pinyin
Chuang Tzu	Zhuang Zi
Confucius	Kong Fu Zi
Fu Hsi	Fu Xi
Huang Ti	Huang Di
(King) Wen	(King) Wen
Lao Tzu	Lao Zi
Li Po	Li Bo
Shen Nung	Shen Nong

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The spiritual teachings of ancient China and the work of Carl Jung have long been an inspiration to him on his own life journey.

Acupuncturists have used the Chinese model of the Five Elements for thousands of years to balance *ch'i*, the vital force of the body. This book explains how you can work with this ancient map of energy and apply a system based on the rhythms of nature to diagnose physical illness, resolve emotional imbalances, and navigate the stages of life.

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Gary Dolowich, M.D. has integrated Five Element acupuncture and Jungian archetypal psychology with Western medicine for the past twenty-five years. In addition to an active medical practice, he currently teaches at several colleges of Chinese medicine.

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